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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE EXPERIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING IN ABUSED WOMEN

BY

DONNA MAUREEN CHOVANEC

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION
IN
ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
SPRING, 1994

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE EXPERIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING IN ABUSED WOMEN submitted by DONNA MAUREEN CHOVANEC in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

Sue M. Scott

Sue M. Scott, Supervisor

Marilyn Assheton-Smith

Rosemary Liburd

Rosemary Liburd

Date: Nov. 15, 1993

MIRRORS

A woman looks from within a mirror,
full of sadness, yet framed in fear,
upon a face of pale white
stark and empty against the night.

What she sees does not explain
the face struck with knives.
Oh, what pain.
But this is a vision hidden from all
reflected only
upon the mirrored wall.

For as the windows open wide
and birds take to flight,
the face turns outward towards the day
with none of this in sight.

Oh, so tired, a frown appears
to break the surface mask.
A look, another and yet once again
reveals a change upon the glass.

For what is now seen was ne'er seen before.
A doubt therein reflected.
A glimmer of truth, a ray of hope
from within the depths detected.

For as the windows open wide
and birds take to flight,
her face turns out towards the day
with new vision in her sight.

DMC Dec 91

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to those women whose lives are an inspiration to me. Each of them has shown me that violence is not our legacy, that we must survive and strive for our dream of respect and equality for all.

To my mother and my sister, strong and loving women, who have been part of my own story of pain and hope. They, in their own lives, offer a vision based on strength and courage.

To Cindy, Diane, Joan and Shelley who have shared their stories of victimization and survival as a bold and powerful message of advocacy.

ABSTRACT

This study is informed by a feminist and critical perspective. Both are drawn from a radical philosophy of social change in which oppression is openly acknowledged, personal lives and social systems are viewed dialectically as political issues, and critical consciousness is required for liberation from oppression. From this framework, abuse towards women is viewed through a socio-political analysis of patriarchy, i.e., violence towards women in their personal lives is analyzed as a political and public issue directly related to the domination of women by men.

Adult educators concerned with social change view consciousness-raising and conscientization as emancipatory learning phenomena. This study is an attempt to enhance understanding of the experience of consciousness-raising in abused women.

The study participants are four formerly abused women who have actively participated in social change efforts in the area of battered women through public education or self-help programs. These women had previously participated in an agency-based abused women's support/educational program and a mutual help drop-in centre for abused women.

Consistent with a feminist and critical philosophy, the research process became increasingly participatory as the study unfolded. The participants were actively involved in research design and methodological decisions throughout the study. Interviews and group dialogues were a dialogic, collaborative attempt to understand the women's lived experience and their own interpretations relative to the research question. Data analysis was a dynamic and ongoing process that included intuition and group dialogue based on feminist interpretive theory.

Research findings are presented in two parts. Firstly, the women's own written narratives stand as a provocative testament to their experience as victims, survivors and advocates. Further, collective theme analysis revealed three major categories:

(1) "An awakening" —a changing consciousness about their own power.

(2) "The societal thing"—an emerging social consciousness about gender power relationships.

(3) "Advocacy"—action taken against the violence in society.

These themes point out the dialectical interrelationship between personal/social and reflection/action activities in the process of transformation.

For each of us, it is important that this study be used for further advocacy against violence and toward empowerment. Strategies are suggested which are intended to contribute to this vision.

PREFACE

We are learning to think critically and are teaching each other this fundamental political act. We are learning to speak out in a world that would have us keep silent. Women are learning to listen to each other and we are finding a common desperation about the state of this world, and a vision of a new society based not on domination and exploitation, but on equality, dignity and respect for the earth and all of its peoples. We have been gathering our resources and gaining confidence in our dreams. Now is the time for action.

Action is a constructive outlet for our anger, an antidote for powerlessness, and a prerequisite for change.

Donna F. Johnson, activist and shelter worker (VIS-A-VIS, Fall 1993)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was part of a stimulating and enlightening educational experience that was shared with many special people. It is to these people that this page is dedicated. I acknowledge each of them for their support, encouragement and challenge.

To my advisor, professor and friend, Sue Scott, for nurturing my academic spirit as she shared her research, her knowledge and herself with me for two years.

To fellow students, my dear friends. Those who cried and laughed with me over nachos and beer (Kathy, Karen, Carrie, and Maureen), those who talked with me about philosophy at every opportunity (especially Donovan and Derek), and my revolutionary partner, Hector, who shared his dreams and gave his love.

To professors, especially my wonderfully supportive committee members (Sue, Marilyn and Rosemary), who taught me so much about a different kind of academia and research that trusts lived experience and challenges the status quo.

To the Drop-In Centre, all the women and the social worker (Derwyn) from whom I learned to speak my experience and share my knowledge.

To Derwyn, a special acknowledgement for her dedication in creating and sustaining the Three Phase Program, a truly remarkable and empowering group experience for women.

To each of these powerful and supportive people, I am deeply grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As a result of the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement, there has been growing awareness and concern about the incidence of family violence in our society (Dobash & Dobash, 1988; MacLeod, 1987; Schechter, 1982). Historically, women have been especially vulnerable to sexual, physical and emotional abuse both as children and as adults. Identification of the problem is only one aspect; another crucial component is to determine a definition of abuse. As Swift and Levin (1987) note: "The way in which a problem is defined implies what action will be taken" (p. 71).

The plight of women who suffer in abusive relationships has often been considered to be an intimate, personal problem (Belenky, et al., 1986; Schechter, 1982). Frequently, therefore, these women have been the responsibility of the mental health care system where their chronic depression, anxiety, etc. has been addressed through "conformist psychology" which focuses on the individual and aims to assist these women in adapting to their circumstances (Hart, 1990a). However, an alternative view, held by feminist therapists and social activists, is that violence towards women is legitimized by social structures which condone, or at least tolerate, male aggressiveness and supremacy/domination while reinforcing female submissiveness and devaluation (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Dobash & Dobash, 1988; Hart, 1985; MacLeod, 1987; Miller, 1986; Paquet-Deehy & Robin, 1991; Schechter, 1982). As such, the problem is redefined from the perspective of power structures within a societal and political context. Likewise, therefore, the action required is transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships in order to assure safety, equality, and justice for <u>all</u> persons (Carle, 1991; Schechter, 1982).

It is likely that both the problem and the solutions are a complex relationship among personal, family and social factors (Maguire, 1987; Office for the Prevention of Family Violence in Alberta, 1990; Paquet-Deehy & Robin, 1991). From a feminist perspective, at each level, the impact of patriarchal structures is undeniable and must be recognized in both analysis and action.

Many women who have been abused have been involved in activities, such as counselling and groups, which provide an opportunity for significant self-reflection and a shared experience. Typically within this process, personal development activities, such as self-esteem or communication skills, are

juxtaposed with a socio-political and structural analysis of women and violence (Paquet-Deehy & Robin, 1991; Whitbread, 1990). Consequently, some women experience a profound transformation of their personal beliefs, assumptions and self-definitions which leads them to make radically different choices in their lives. Jack Mezirow (1990) calls this phenomenon "perspective transformation." Additionally, at least some women seem to experience a qualitatively different transformation in which they become highly oriented, not only to reflection and action specific to their own personal situation, but they also engage in a praxis which is more accurately described as "consciousness-raising" (Hart, 1990a) or "conscientization" (Freire, 1990).

These terms connote a process through which people become aware of the contradictions and injustices inherent in oppressive socio-political and economic systems and take action against these oppressive elements (Freire, 1990; Hart, 1990a). This implies that internal belief systems which supported previous assumptions about the personal and social world are also transformed (Collins, 1977).

Some formerly battered women are now visible in community leadership roles related to lobbying, public education, self-help programs or support group counselling. By this means, they have actively contributed to socio-political change efforts. It is their experience of "consciousness-raising" that is the focus of this study.

Research Questions

1. How is the process of consciousness-raising experienced by women who have been abused?

2. To what extent is there a relationship between personal and social transformation in the process of consciousness-raising?

3. What strategies facilitate this process?

Assumptions

The researcher always enters the research situation with assumptions based on her own personal philosophies and previous experience. Some of these are articulated at the outset; many more become apparent as the study unfolds. Of particular note is my own past history of family violence and my

subsequent experience with individual and group counselling. Also, my extensive experience as a social worker has contributed to my system of beliefs and assumptions. Over time, I have begun to look differently at old realities.

In addition to one's personal history, it is also vitally important that the researcher's theoretical framework be clearly articulated. Both are interrelated and then, in turn, interact with the information generated by the research itself. This dialectic is captured in the following quote:

> ...Data are not detachable from theory; theories are models of the way the facts themselves are seen...data do not necessarily speak for themselves; what is factual (what is regarded as data) greatly depends at least partly on one's social location, social identity, and research purposes. (Nielsen, 1990, p. 15)

DuBois (1983) makes a similar point in relation to the influence of our beliefs about the nature of reality. She acknowledges this additional method of sense-making in her comment, "...beliefs, too, are ways of knowing" (p. 105). In this sense, "conscious subjectivity" (Duelli Klein, 1983) is not an impediment but an asset to the research experience. Stanley and Wise (1983b) concur that this "vulnerability" makes the researcher "...extremely valuable in ways usually avoided by researchers like the plague" (p. 196).

Consequently, two main assumptions based on my theoretical framework (outlined more explicitly in Chapter 2) were identified at the outset. Firstly, I believe that abuse towards women is fundamentally inhuman and unjust yet is societally sanctioned and that radical social change is required in order to eradicate this extreme example of male domination. Secondly, I assume that, as women, we have the potential to create change for ourselves and for others. As Freire (1990) says, we <u>can</u> become the creators of our own history. Further, I hold that this is realized in a mutual, collective process. Maria Westkott's (1990) words echo this second assumption: "...an affirmation of the idea of a human being as fully and freely creating herself and the world in which she lives, a process which includes negotiating that creation through dialogue with others" (p. 62). A supplemental assumption which particularly supports my research question is that this process of consciousness-raising <u>does</u> occur for some abused women and can be described and understood.

Further assumptions became apparent as I worked and learned with the women participants. Mostly I became aware of how deeply I believe in the

existence of a patriarchy, how clearly I see its effects and consequences in the world around me, and how difficult it is for me to remain optimistic about the future of women within the shadow of patriarchy's oppressive history, power and established authority. Yet, I remain hopeful and committed to the eradication of patriarchy so that all people can participate and benefit equally in our social and material world. I am also influenced in this duality of pessimism and optimism by my growing awareness of the intersection of patriarchy with capitalistic and imperialistic structures that have oppressed all the world's people. A simple but profound quote shared with me by a friend during my own crisis of commitment has sustained me. He described this struggle as "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will." I bring this contradiction with me into the research endeavour and savour it as a vital part of the process of change.

A note about the use of the first person in academic writing is interjected here. Such a choice is a risky endeavour because it increases the visibility and vulnerability of the researcher. Hence, it does not allow her to remain a neutral observer. This is congruent with the rejection, by feminist researchers, of the traditional research stance of objectivity and neutrality. Maguire (1987), also studying battered women, states that "to strive for a detached stance puts the feminist researcher in a contradictory position...[which] expects her to describe other women's oppression while ignoring her own" (p. 88-89.) Writing in the first person recognizes this research experience as one which occurred <u>with</u> other battered women rather than apart from them. It is an attempt to situate myself, as an abused woman, in the study, to acknowledge my subjectivity and to honor my own journey through the research experience.

Scope of the Study

Battered women were studied. In this study, these were adult women who had been sexually, physically, emotionally and/or psychologically abused by their partners and had left their abusive partners prior to the initiation of the study. Additionally, the women were selected from among a group of such women who had attended formal support group programs and were active in community advocacy efforts.

Definition of Terms

In a qualitative study, it is difficult to select and define relevant terms at the outset because culturally valid language and meanings are derived from the

participants themselves. Initial definitions based on the literature were selected as a starting point with the expectation that these may change or others emerge to reflect the experience of the women as they named their own reality in their own language. The terms which follow, therefore, are defined specifically for the purposes of this study.

Although the terms "consciousness-raising" and "conscientization" are derived from different literature sources, they reflect a remarkably similar understanding of a particular process of change. Both terms are used in the literature review. The feminist term "consciousness-raising" was ultimately selected in consultation with the participants as the primary term because the definition outlined below resonates personally for us as feminists.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING: According to Mechtild Hart (1990a), consciousness-raising is a cycle which includes three power-related components:
(1) "the actual experience of power on the individual level"
(2) "a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality"
(3) "a practical orientation toward emancipatory action" (p. 70-71).

CONSCIENTIZATION: "Learning to perceive economic, political, and social contradictions and take action to change oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1990, p. 19). "It necessarily involves...the internalization of new belief patterns and constructs for the organization of experience and behaviour" (Collins, 1977, p. 3).

In other words, both definitions suggest that one's personal experience is viewed within a socio-political context so that problems, such as abuse, are recognized as collective, social problems rather than isolated, personal ones and change efforts are directed at such structures.

Other terms which initially guided the development of the research questions were also defined.

TRANSFORMATION: A thorough or dramatic change, e.g., shift in worldview orientation, self-definition, assumptions and beliefs (personal) or reconstruction of societal structures including interpersonal relationships, resources or access to opportunities (social).

STRATEGIES: A variety of means chosen to facilitate changes.

Probably nowhere is language more obviously a tool of power and authority than in situations where it is used to control or contain victims. The definition of abuse, therefore, becomes a political act. The terms "abused" and "battered" are used interchangeably in this study. The definition adopted by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) (MacLeod, 1987) is used because it reflects both the theoretical framework of the study and the participants' real-life understanding of abuse.

ABUSED or BATTERED WOMEN: Women who have experienced "... violence, physical and/or psychological, expressed by a husband or a male or lesbian live-in lover, to which the 'wife' does not consent, and which is directly or indirectly condoned by the traditions, laws and attitudes prevalent in the society in which it occurs" (p. 13).

It is no surprise that the language used by and among the women to describe their own experience was different from that found in published literature. After exposure to the language of the women for a few months, I began to realize the power of their own words and meanings. They spoke with language based in their everyday reality, some of which was terminology with shared meaning learned during their involvement in support programs. Once I understood the significance of certain words, they became part of our working vocabulary. For instance, some of these more familiar and meaningful terms framed the research question during interviews.

As Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner (1990) assert:

> If we see rich potential in the language people use to describe their daily activities, then we have to take advantage of the opportunity to let them tell us what that language means. (p. 100)

The following definitions are intended to elucidate the reading of those chapters which are drawn directly from the research findings. Some of the definitions are derived from an interpretation of the interview transcripts; others are articulated in their own words.

ABUSE: "The slow and continual erosion of your self-worth until you believe most, if not all, of what other people, namely your partner, tell you that you are."

VICTIM: Perceiving oneself to be powerless, controlled by other circumstances or people.

SURVIVOR: One who is determining and initiating actions to ensure her own and her children's safety.

ADVOCATE: One who has the strength and power to advocate on her own and others' behalf. (See definition of advocacy below.)

HEALING: "First of all, understanding the dynamics of violence and...then preparing yourself for that process of going on with your life." "Not being afraid of change."

ADVOCACY: "To educate society about what [abuse] does to women...to help other people see that they can speak up for what they believe in and trust it." It includes "not accepting [abuse] for yourself either...then it progresses to role-modeling for your children and the people you come in contact with....changing society..."

Defining the support group programs which the women and I attended is a vital part of understanding the context of our lives and the research findings.

Three Phase Program: Refers to the "Abused Women's Support Group, Three Phase Program" which is a structured support group program for battered women facilitated by trained social workers, sometimes co-facilitated by battered women. It is operated by various community-based centres within the City of Edmonton, Community and Family Services department. Combining social-emotional support with education, the program has three segments of eight weeks each. Two initial segments focus more, although not

exclusively, on a theoretical understanding of abuse and personal development (i.e., thinking, feeling), while a third segment is oriented to change strategies, such as personal and public advocacy (i.e., doing). The program, like all other department services, is free.

Drop-In Centre: Refers to the "Beverly Drop-In Centre for Abused Women" which was initiated by the first graduates of the Three Phase Program. It is a mutual support group co-sponsored by the women who attend the group in conjunction with Community and Family Services and WIN House, a local battered women's shelter. Planning and leadership of the Drop-in Centre is shared both formally and informally between trained social workers and the abused women who attend the group. Both crisis support and advocacy are the aims of the group.

Relevance of the Study

It is intolerable that women continue to be unsafe within their own homes. We must work "...to create a world in which men do not brutalize the very women they profess to love and cherish" (Maguire, 1987, p. xiii). An understanding of how women begin to look critically at this unjust situation such that their individual and collective consciousness is raised and structural societal changes can result may offer a glimmer of hope toward this vision. In a recent CACSW report on wife battering, MacLeod (1987) cites changes in societal values and goals as well as evidence of changes in laws, services and awareness. She states:

> Society's expanding knowledge and growing concern with this issue has resulted in a realization that we are at a crossroads in terms of societal tolerance of violence and injustice, and in terms of efforts to combat violence against women and the suffering it produces.

This has only recently been explored within adult education. Adult educators concerned with social change view both consciousness-raising within the women's movement and the conscientization of a pedagogy for liberation as emancipatory learning phenomena. Feminist adult educators,

such as Butterwick (1987) and Hart (1985), identify commonalties between the two processes. Hart (1985) proposes that a study of women's consciousness-raising experiences, which "reveal the facts of social violence and injustice" (p. 133), are important

> because they supply us with examples for emancipatory processes which a theory and practice of liberatory education has much to learn from...This is of special relevance for the field of adult education, since it deals with the results of many years of socialization in the form of well-entrenched habits of perception and experience. (p. 133)

Hence, it is anticipated that the study of battered women's experience of consciousness-raising will offer insight for both teaching and learning. Firstly, the transformation of self and society seems to occur within the context of learning. Secondly, it is important for adult educators who work with women, abused or not, or any other marginalized or victimized group, to understand this essential learning process and the educational strategies which might enhance or aid its occurrence. Thirdly, the transformation of social structures is, in large part, an educational endeavour. The eradication of abuse towards women requires systematic and committed efforts to reveal, describe, inform and challenge individuals and groups throughout society, including law-makers, policy-makers, social service systems and everyday people.

Thesis Overview

Following this introductory chapter which establishes the research parameters, Chapter 2 reviews the literature upon which a theoretical framework was created for the research experience. Chapter 3 outlines the feminist research methodology. Findings are then presented in two parts. The women's personal stories are presented in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 suggests a synthesis of the data based on three major themes. Interpretations and implications for adult education research and practice are introduced in Chapter 6 along with an action plan which truly depicts the praxis of the research.

CHAPTER 2 — A CRITICAL WORLDVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relevant to the statement of the problem as identified in Chapter 1. In qualitative research, the literature review is used to set research boundaries and identify the underlying theoretical concepts which guide the questions asked and the methodology chosen. Although it is clearly articulated, it is somewhat tentative in order to allow theory to also emerge from the data gathered during the course of the research. Hence, from a general and theoretical stance, this chapter outlines the main concepts which guided the research. These are: a theoretical framework based on an analysis of feminism and liberation pedagogy, a theoretical perspective relative to abused women, and a summary of feminist research theory.

Theoretical Framework

Clearly, an underlying philosophy leads me to ask the questions I ask and seek answers in the way that I do. This study is informed by a feminist and critical perspective, drawing heavily from the work of feminist and liberation pedagogy. The theoretical framework was developed from an analysis of the similarities between the pivotal themes of feminism and the salient points in the work of Paulo Freire. This framework then provided the basis from which the research question was drawn, the methodology chosen and the problem of battered women considered.

Both feminist and critical approaches are "educational processes concerned with the development of critical consciousness as the basis for social change" (Butterwick, 1987, p. 19). A significant difference is feminism's focus on women. A definition of each provides an essential understanding of their shared paradigm or worldview.

> Feminist theory is a set of interrelated principles that seek to explain women's place in the world. It is a theory that stems from the women's movement, and is intimately connected to the tenets and history of that movement. Like the women's movement, feminist theory seeks to further the liberation of women. (Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987, p. 18)

> [The pedagogy of the oppressed] makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that

> reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. (Freire,1990, p. 33)

These definitions are representative of the shared themes which are reviewed in the literature. For the purposes of this chapter, these are: oppression, personal/social dialectic, critical consciousness and liberation. When relevant, the relationship of these four themes to violence is indicated.

Open acknowledgement of **oppression** provides the impetus for both feminism (Hart, 1990a; Stanley & Wise, 1983a) and a "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Freire, 1990). Oppression is sustained via a number of mechanisms which marginalize and victimize sectors of a given popuiation in order to promote the interests of other sectors. One such mechanism is the development and transmission of epistemology. The pertinent issue is that the oppressor claims knowledge and compels the endorsement of it by the oppressed. Eventually, the oppressed absorb and internalize the dominant beliefs and ways of knowing, even though they do not reflect the reality of the subordinate group (Miller, 1986). This delusion is reinforced by the objectification of both knowledge and knower, resulting in an artificial dichotomy between objective and subjective ways of knowing and naming the world (Freire,1990; Hart, 1985; Smith, 1990).

In an analysis of women's oppression, this concept is embodied within the self-sanctioned enforcement of male hegemony and power. Men, sanctioned to operate as objective beings within the public sphere, position women in the realm of the subjective (e.g., intuitive and emotional) which is relegated to the private sphere (Martel & Peterat, 1988; Smith, 1990). Clearly, a contradiction is evident in that, although this experience is prescribed for women, it is simultaneously devalued (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986). Not unlike Freire's (1990) "culture of silence," this "gendered organization of subjectivity dichotomizes the two worlds, estranges them, and silences the locally situated consciousness by silencing women" (Smith, 1990, p. 19). Even when violently abused, some women are "...notable for their inability to speak out to protest" (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 29).

Ultimately, according to Freire (1990) and Hart (1985), the interests of the oppressors are upheld by the threat of violence. In fact, Freire argues that "there would be no oppressed if there had been no prior situation of violence to

establish their subjugation" (p. 41). In the following quote by Hart (1985), the process of oppression is unequivocally expressed.

> Within the context of female oppression, power is defined in terms of male-supremacist structures and ideologies....It always has the same purpose: to keep individual autonomy within strict and narrowly defined boundaries. This can occur either through direct, open power in the form of violence (or the permanent threat of violence), or through the mechanism of a false consciousness in the grips of beliefs and assumptions which reflect and cement power relations. (p. 120)

There can be no doubt that Freire recognizes a socio-political nature to all activities and disavows the traditional dichotomy between **personal and social** experience. Burke (1980), using a Freirean framework in her research of Peruvian women, states that it is "in economic and social systems, we find the origins of interpersonal relationships and of personal self-concepts" (p. 8). Like Freire, she laments individualistic orientations to problems and solutions which tend to situate personal problems in the individual, placing blame for being lazy, stupid or inept upon the victim, thereby "obscuring any historical or political analysis of problems" (Burke, 1980, p. 8).

For feminists, "the personal is political...means that women experience the reality of unequal power relationships within their personal lives" (Butterwick, 1987, p. 21). This suggests that systems of power are experienced in everyday lives but have their roots in the social and economic order (Hart, 1990a; Stanley & Wise, 1983a). Therefore, women must look closely at their personal, private lives in order to analyze their oppression. This necessarily implies that personal, subjective experience is politically valid knowledge unlike the patriarchal epistemology discussed earlier which "has prevented us from making the bridges between our emotional experiences and social conditions" (Thompson, 1983, p. 16).

West and Blumberg (1990) have reported that, historically and globally, women have often expressed themselves politically through social protest in an effort to meet basic survival needs for themselves and their children. For example, they cite the Women's Christian Temperance Union which became unwittingly involved in an earlier wave of feminism because "they perceived alcoholism as a problem from which women suffered disproportionately through battering and child abuse" (West & Blumberg, 1990, p. 22). Usually, these kinds

of activities were seen to be an extension of women's nurturing and mothering roles and, for that reason, marginally tolerated. Still, women's "contributions have been ignored, misrepresented, or erased from history in a patriarchal world" (p. 8) so that each successive generation of women have begun anew with no awareness of the work of her sisters.

For both feminists and Freireans, the development of **critical consciousness** is a cornerstone concept. Central to each is that the social order which was previously taken-for-granted is made problematic, including, but not limited to, socially prescribed roles and expectations (Mezirow, 1990). "This involves seeing the same reality differently" (Stanley & Wise, 1983a, p. 54). A number of mutually valued ideas are proposed by the two theories which together are assumed to contribute to an evolutionary, emancipatory process. Simply stated, through a process of dialogue, common themes emerge which reveal contradictions; a dialectical interaction between action and reflection, termed praxis, results in commitment to create structural social change. Additionally, it is commonly recognized that the development of critical consciousness is grounded in a particular social, historic, political and economic context which is in a "dialectical relationship" (Freire, 1985) with the change process (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Burke, 1980; Freire, 1985; West & Blumberg, 1990).

Clearly, this sequential description is an artificial representation of a process which is, in reality, highly dynamic and interactive. However, each aspect distinctly considered, offers some understanding of the whole. Dialogue is an essential component of the entire process of critical consciousness (Belenky, et al., 1986; Freire, 1990; Hart, 1990a). Hart (1990a) recalls the dialogic experience of the early women's groups. She believes that, during a shared breaking of silence, "the previously idiosyncratic or private experience of misery is now de-privatized by being recognized as a symptom of oppression" (p. 55). Furthermore, themes are generated which stimulate further critical reflection. The process which Hart describes is reminiscent of Freire's (1990) problem-posing methodology whereby the teacher-learner, uses the "decodification" of "generative themes" to promote increasingly critical reflection. In fact, Hart (1985) is herself explicit about this connection in an earlier article and Maguire (1987) developed generative themes in her research with battered women.

Through dialogue with others, new meanings emerge (Belenky, et al., 1986; Hart, 1990a) which reveal both internal and external contradictions (Burke,

1980). As described by Stanley and Wise (1983a), this is a result of seeing both the new reality and the old reality simultaneously. "Reality, *is* much more complex and multi-dimensional than we ordinarily suppose it to be, and it *is* contradictory" (p. 54). They cite Bartky on the same theme; "both ways of viewing the same reality, and the contradictions which result, are equally 'real'" (p. 54).

Consequently, people can begin to acknowledge that reality is politically and socially constructed, that it is not static but constantly changing (Freire, 1990; Hart, 1990a). By "demythologizing" their situation, people are then able to envision themselves as creators of their own history (Freire, 1990). Language and naming become central concepts. DuBois (1983) refers to a two-fold power of naming, that of both defining and denying reality. The latter signifies the imposed powerlessness of "the situation of women in our world" (p. 108).

> That which has no name, that for which we have no words or concepts, is rendered mute and invisible: powerless to inform or transform our consciousness of our experience, our understanding, our vision; powerless to claim its own existence. (p. 108)

For Freire, "dialogue is the encounter between men [sic] mediated by the world in order to name the world" (1990, p. 76). In later work, he speaks more directly about the importance of women's own language.

> In the process of their struggle, they have to use their own language, not man's language...Language variations...help defend one's sense of identity and they are absolutely necessary in the process of struggling for liberation. (1985, p. 186)

This is clearly articulated within feminist literature as well. In their ideological summary of the feminist movement, Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) repeatedly emphasize the significance of language in women's healing process.

> Renaming reality according to our own experience involves ...rejecting names (words, language, symbols) that are not grounded directly in our experience but which, because we have adopted them, have the effect of containing and controlling us. (p. 17)

It is at this juncture that the well-recognized terms "conscientization" (Freire) and "consciousness-raising" (feminism) become especially relevant. Common to both definitions is the emphasis on critical awareness which leads to activation for the transformation of political, economic and social structures (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Burke, 1980; Butterwick, 1987; Freire, 1990; Hart, 1990a).

However, while liberation theorists and practitioners advise vigilance about the possibility of a regressive shift to a psychologistic enterprise (Burke, 1980; Hart, 1985, 1990a), the crucial significance of individual change should not be lost in the emphasis on the more global mission. Mezirow (1989) contends that "...we must begin with individual perspective transformations before social transformations can succeed" (p. 363). Similarly, Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) postulate that "our vision of a new social order incorporates a vision of the transformation and the liberation of our most intimate lives" (p. 17). Thompson (1983) refers to the unique capacity of women's liberation "to both create and be created by change" (p. 202). More typical of a feminist perspective, the latter statements reflect a more dialectic, rather than linear, relationship between the two goals.

Throughout this section, there has been clear indication that oppressed persons must become agents of their own change. The dynamic integration of action and reflection is an essential component in the development of critical consciousness (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Freire, 1990). This praxis is defined as "the type of action that makes possible the transformation of reality" (Vio Grossi, 1981, p. 72).

Hart (1990a) encapsulates the above discussion about the individual, societal and praxis components of critical consciousness in the following quote.

> The full cycle of consciousness raising therefore includes the actual experience of power on the individual level, a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality, and a practical orientation toward emancipatory action. (p. 70-71)

There is no doubt that **liberation** from oppression is the intended outcome, not only for the oppressed but for the oppressor as well, because one is as bound within the unjust system as the other (Freire, 1990; Smith, 1990). From a feminist perspective, this means that during the process of changing our world by changing ourselves, both the female oppressed and the male oppressors

are liberated and humanized ((Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Martel & Peterat, 1988; Thompson, 1983).

In order to achieve an egalitarian society, both personal action and public campaigns are needed (Thompson, 1983). In addition to changes in our personal relationships and everyday lives, sustained political struggle is required so as to develop a "critical mass", that is, "the accumulation of contradictions to the point of paradigmatic crisis and change" (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986). For feminists, this means that "...the systematic subordination of women known as patriarchy is overthrown, undermined, transformed, or replaced with a system of thought, behavior, and values that corrects the subordination of half the human race" (Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987, p. 20).

Again, similarities between Freire's and feminists' approaches are clearly evident in their vision of the role of epistemology, power, education and research in the creation of a new social order.

It is commonly reinforced within feminist literature that, as women, we must reconstruct our lost culture and infuse feminist consciousness and values into our world (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987; Martel & Peterat, 1988; Miles, 1989; Thompson, 1983). This emphatically implies the "very transformation of knowledge" (Miles, 1989, p. 11). Freire (1990) states that, in the process of liberation, the oppressed not only re-create knowledge but also "...discover themselves as its permanent re-creators" (p. 56). The concept of shared power is repeatedly emphasized (Freire, 1990; Hart, 1990a; Smith 1990). This includes collaborative, consensual leadership and decision-making models in a collective and unifying process (Hart, 1985, 1990a; Martel & Peterat, 1988). The importance of education is emphasized yet, traditional educational practices and institutions are jointly criticized by Freire and feminists. Instead, the democratization of pedagogy is advocated whereby participation in both process and content empowers the learner and validates the learner's existing knowledge (Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987; Martel & Peterat, 1988; Thompson, 1983). Emancipatory research repudiates the tenets of logical positivism and embodies the principles discussed above. A dialectical relationship among theory, research and practice is proposed (Belenky, et al., 1986; Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987; Freire, 1990; Smith, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983a, 1983b).

The philosophical and theoretical similarities between feminism and Freire provide the theoretical framework from which the research questions were

drawn, the literature about battered women was reviewed and a research approach was selected.

Abused (Battered) Women

Many aspects of abuse, especially towards women, have been studied, discussed, surmised over the past decade or so. Landmark studies related to battered wives have been conducted by Dobash and Dobash (1979), Martin (1976), Pagelow (1981), Strauss, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) and Walker (1979). Important questions about prevalence, etiology, consequences, treatment and cost have been raised and answers sought. A greater understanding of the issues has resulted and various theories have been developed (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 1990; Westhues, 1989). Community responses to the problem have been varied but are most apparent in the marked increase in shelters and resource centers (MacLeod, 1987; Westhues, 1989).

It is not the intention of this chapter to review the wealth of pertinent literature produced by academic, popular, professional, community, government and women's groups. Rather, theorists, practitioners and advocates who view abuse towards women through a socio-political analysis of patriarchy are briefly represented. Typically, these writers approach this problem from a theoretical stance similar to that described in the previous section. In fact, most indicate that heightened awareness towards the issue of battered women was "no mere accident, this groundswell was the result of the changing political consciousness and organizing activity of women" (Schechter, 1982, p. 29).

Historically, the battered women's movement developed out of the momentum of the women's movement and was preceded by the anti-rape movement. This sequence of events was born in the consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 70s. Directly related to the debunking of the male-oriented separation between private and social lives, the women's movement was unique in its attention to both personal and institutional change (NiCarthy, Merriam & Coffman, 1984; Rawlings & Carter, 1977; Schechter, 1982; Smith, 1990).

> By claiming that what happened between men and women in the privacy of their own home was deeply political, the women's liberation movement set the stage for the battered women's movement. (Schechter, 1982, p. 31)

As women began to disclose abuse in safe and supportive groups, they began to analyze this violence which occurred in their personal lives as a political issue directly related to the domination of women by men (MacLeod, 1987; Schechter, 1982). Despite the supportive role of consciousness-raising groups and concurrent action on a variety of women's issues, the issue of family violence was not openly articulated until the mid to late 1970s (Schechter, 1982). Many explanations are offered which include lack of resources, ingrained beliefs about marriage, womanhood and privacy and feelings of fear and shame (NiCarthy, Merriam & Coffman, 1984; Schechter, 1982).

These concerns fueled a grassroots movement to provide safe havens for women and children who were victims of violence in the home (MacLeod, 1987; Schechter, 1982; Westhues, 1989). However, shelters were not enough. Often, "...women were [still] left to untangle their 'personal' problems within a social and political context that extolled family unity and legitimated male dominance" (Schechter, 1982, p. 55). Therefore, attempts were made to improve conditions for abused women by advocating for social and legal changes, as well, such as changing social attitudes through educational efforts and advocating for equitable marital property laws (NiCarthy, Merriam & Coffman, 1984; Schechter, 1982). Westhues (1989) refers to a "third wave" focused on prevention which "is only seriously beginning" (p. 138).

The relationship between social action and personal growth is not extensively addressed and that which does address this dialectic is almost entirely within feminist literature. Specific to this question, Gluckstern (1977) distinguishes between an explicitly designated social action group and a consciousness-raising group. Whereas the former "moves from working toward common political goals to a consideration of personal issues" (p. 435), the latter engages in a discussion of feeling and experiences which are analyzed and then acted upon. She adds that political consciousness "enables women to break out of the debilitating cycle of self-blame and inaction" (p. 443). She proposes an interactional model of change that begins and ends with social action and incorporates personal change (Gluckstern, 1977). In contrast, the "dialectical base for an activist approach" posited by Adams and Durham (1977) "uses the client's personal contradictions or conflicts to help the client become aware of related root contradictions in society" (Rawlings & Carter, 1977, p. 407). Although not providing an explanation of how this occurs, Schechter

(1982) addresses this interaction between personal and social change in relation to the women who worked within the shelter movement, both professionals and non-professionals.

> Once a part of the battered women's movement, women's analyses and understanding grew and changed over time, as they found themselves transformed through shelter and movement life. (p. 52)

Consistent with a feminist orientation, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Kome, 1989) encourages women to redefine many of their problems as political issues and take action accordingly. To this end "Every Voice Counts: A Guide to Personal and Political Action" was published (Kome, 1989). Locally, in the Abused Women's Support Group, Three Phase Program (Whitbread, 1990), women are supported through a module which assists them in understanding the systemic causes of abuse, another which focuses on self-development and a third which emphasizes social change activities.

> ...It is in Phase III, when they become advocates on behalf of all abused women and children, that the women will achieve a firmer personal commitment to never again be victims or perpetrators of family violence. (Whitbread, 1990, Preface)

In summary, although many explanations for the causes and responses to battered women have been proposed (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Westhues, 1989), the sources cited above view this issue from a feminist perspective, that is, family violence is an outcome of "a gendered society in which male power dominates" (Breines & Gordon, 1983, p. 493). Additionally, women have acted upon this growing realization through both personal changes in their private lives and socio-political changes in societal structures. How this process of personal and social transformation actually occurs is not clear.

Feminist Research Approach

Discussion about the research approach is included at this point in order to review the literature with the specific purpose of providing a theoretical rationale for the use of the chosen methodologies and an explanation of the underlying philosophy and assumptions. Three common principles inherent in feminist research are summarized here. These are: (1) the relationship to other research approaches and to feminism, (2) a theoretical grounding in everyday

experience in interaction with a political and transformative intent, and (3) subjectivity. Specific methods and techniques are detailed in Chapter 3.

For some time, the foundational principles of traditional social science research have been questioned. Feminist researchers, such as Mies (1983), Nielsen (1990) and Stanley and Wise (1983b), position feminist research within a larger movement, or paradigm shift, which critiques the epistemological assumptions of the positivistic research paradigm. They typically cite hermeneutics, critical theory, popular and participatory research approaches and symbolic interactionism as sharing particular concerns, critiques and alternative epistemological assumptions, particularly the notion that knowledge is a social construction and, therefore, highly value-laden. Sharing many characteristics of alternative research approaches, Nielsen (1990) suggests that feminist research is "empirical, interpretive and critical" (p. 26).

As with feminist theory in general, a major distinguishing characteristic of feminist research is its attention to women. Historically,

> feminist research began as a result of consciousness-raising that would not have occurred without the women's movement that began in the 1960s...This revolution did not originate within the process of research and scholarship. An interest in women produced anomalies rather than the other way around. (Nielsen, 1990, p. 22-23)

As a "feminist consciousness" emerged, women realized that prevailing theories did not reflect their own experience in the world. Further critique revealed the patriarchal bias that had infused research to that point. The exclusion of women's experience from research is well-documented. Discrepancies or contradictions in those studies which included women were ignored or women were simply not included in studies. Indeed, "the patriarchal bias is reflected in the ways in which questions about women are posed: the absence of concepts that tap women's experience..." (Westkott, 190, p. 60). Dobash and Dobash (1988) make this observation in relation to research on battered women when they challenge the emphasis on the commonly asked question "why do women stay?" More significantly, both questions and answers posited about women are frequently used to control or victimize women further. For example, seminal research about human development was not conducted on women yet is used to prescribe "normal" developmental patterns and

behaviours for women, thereby solidifying the oppressive concept of deviance (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986).

The feminist concept of research for women, based on feminist principles and beliefs, has two interrelated aims: (1) to study the concrete everyday experience of women, grounding theory in that experience and (2) to facilitate women's liberation (Cook & Fonow, 1990; Duelli Klein, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1983a, 1983b; Westkott, 1990). DuBois (1983) articulates the first essential focus.

> To address women's lives and experience *in their own terms*, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women, is the central agenda for feminist social science and scholarship. (p. 108)

As a result, one can "see things one did not see before and also see the familiar rather differently" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 20) so that "women's actions are being reinterpreted and profoundly illuminated from the perspective of women's consciousness" (Westkott, 1990, p. 65). Interest in the study of previously ignored phenomena, such as wife abuse, is thereby generated (Nielsen, 1990).

The inherently political agenda is vital to an understanding of feminist research. Nielsen (1990) notes that even when feminists have conducted research from within the traditional framework of assumptions and methods, the intention was political. Feminist research is sustained by a commitment to a new vision of the future "which stands in opposition to the present conditions of the cultural domination of women" (Westkott, 1990, 64). There is an explicit belief that "the purpose of knowledge is to change or transform patriarchy" (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p.79). Nielsen (1990) and Westkott (1990) note that this assumption is based in the affirmation of the idea of women as both subjects and creators of our experience. In this regard, feminist research approaches are likened to, or incorporate as method, consciousness-raising processes (Cook & Fonow, 1990; Mies, 1983).

Central to any account of feminist research theory is the rejection of the traditional objective/subjective dichotomy. This distinction is supported by patriarchal assumptions about knowledge and knower wherein it is believed that the knower is able to stand apart from the experience of that which is to be known, as a neutral, disinterested or objective observer of a phenomenon that occurs outside oneself. It is further assumed that the researcher is able to hold

her own assumptions, beliefs, values and experience (i.e., subjectivity) in abeyance through a process know as "bracketing." Many feminist researchers have critiqued this position (Nielsen, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983b). This approach reinforces the power relationships between researcher and researched (Stanley & Wise, 1983b) and contributes to the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge (Westkott, 1990).

Instead, feminists take the unequivocal stance that "science is *not* 'value-free'" (DuBois, 1983, p. 105). Hence, researchers must consciously situate themselves within the research experience. Subjectivity cannot be ignored, i.e., we cannot "pretend to leave the self and the valuing process out of science-making" (DuBois, 1983, p. 112). In this regard, Stanley and Wise (1983b) refer to the researcher's "vulnerability" and Duelli Klein (1983) to "conscious subjectivity." Westkott's (1990) concept of "intersubjectivity" is often cited by other feminist researchers and scholars.

> Women studying women reveals the complex way in which women as objects of knowledge reflect back upon women as subjects of knowledge. Knowledge of the other and knowledge of the self are mutually informing, because self and other share a common condition of being women...This intersubjectivity does not mean the identity of subject and object, but rather their dialectical relationship. Thus the questions that the investigator asks of the object of knowledge grows out of her own concerns and experiences. (p. 61-62)

Using Westkott's framework, Duelli Klein (1983) suggests that in Mies' (1983) research "the battered women were not looked upon as research 'objects' but as sisters, as mirrors of selves, as 'subjects'" (p. 94).

In summary, there are three primary theoretical considerations of a feminist researcher. Firstly, research must be founded upon an understanding of feminist history and epistemology, and a shared critique of traditional social science. Secondly, the research is intended to both make visible the experience of women, grounded in everyday reality and to contribute to the emancipation of women. Lastly, feminist researchers accept and embrace their subjectivity as women who share a common oppressive heritage, the reality of survival and a vision for the future.

Summary

This chapter has outlined three theoretical components which contributed to the research endeavour. Firstly, the theoretical framework, a synthesis of feminist and Freirean theory, provided the basis from which the research question was posed, underlying assumptions about personal and social worlds were articulated and the research paradigm was considered. Secondly, once superimposed upon the literature about abused or battered women, theory provided an increasingly focused analysis to the phenomena under study. Lastly, a theoretical review of feminist research theory reveals the basis upon which specific methodological choices were made.

CHAPTER 3 — THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Reflection

This chapter describes the doing of research as a dialectical process between researcher and participants, between theory and practice and through internal reflection. I began the research experience equipped with a question based on my own reality as an abused woman, some theoretical concepts and a commitment to do research that might make some kind of small difference in the world. Almost immediately, I found other women with similar experiences, theory and dedication. Some of these women shared the journey with me as consultants and participants in this study.

As we created and re-created the research experience, changing our approach to mesh with our realities, we became more excited about the way we were doing research. It didn't seem quite so mystical or authoritative as we had been taught to believe. Rather, we enjoyed and felt empowered by the process. Some, such as Cindy, referred often to their sense of growth and progress in the process of sharing; "I'll say I actually am enjoying it because...I thought I had dealt with most of it and maybe facing it, or whatever, has helped me to progress farther, to deal with it more." Shelley noted that the group sessions were particularly helpful because "I can learn from you...and I can offer you little tidbits of whatever I know." Diane articulated that her participation in the project felt like an "equal" relationship, unlike her previous experiences with interviewing where "it's almost like they're better than [me]." Instead, she identified her sense of a mutual purpose that "...makes us feel good because that's advocacy for us."

Once the interviews were completed, tentative themes identified and a commitment to future action established, I was still left with the task of identifying and rationalizing this research method. In reflecting on the process, I could not clearly identify a particular approach in the qualitative research literature that named our actual experience. I searched for a means to make sense of our experience so that I could write an acceptable academic thesis. I wondered if I had really conducted "proper research." I questioned the impact of my subjectivity—my biases, beliefs and philosophical framework. It seemed that I needed to rationalize the findings more systematically yet it didn't feel right to assume some kind of objectified authority apart from the involvement of the women. I was torn between my commitment to participatory, subjective

research and the objective neutrality of traditional research approaches. What would make sense academically yet remain true to the process that we had established and my own subjective involvement? What a relief to find this confusing experience articulated so clearly by feminist researcher, Barbara DuBois (1983).

> I'd be surprised if there is anyone who is doing feminist scholarship who hasn't at some point wondered whether she were being honest and 'objective' in her work, whether she weren't perhaps 'making it all up,' whether she were being manipulative or biased in her design, her reporting, her interpretations...They are natural; they express the fertile conflict between the ways we've been taught to see, know and judge reality, and the beginnings of a different cosmos of values about what reality is and how it can be known. (p. 113)

With the support and understanding of academic colleagues, I looked to other sources, some of which I had put aside earlier. It was exhilarating to read the feminist literature about research. It seemed immediately meaningful and applicable to my research experience and philosophy. I had found an academic language to articulate our praxis as co-researchers.

I realized that the participant's and I had been led, not so much by the research plan, but by the feminist framework which we all shared. Our research "method," then, was a reflection of ourselves; it was our attempt to live as women concerned about violence, as feminists. Stanley and Wise (1983b) articulate this succinctly in the following quote.

> We believe that feminist research should be the doing of feminism in another context. We don't believe that 'doing feminist research' requires activities or procedures other than those which we ordinarily use in ordinarily understanding ourselves as people and as feminists in the social world.
> (p. 195)

Later in the process, however, I faced a significant contradiction. Although I had been involved throughout the study in sharing my thoughts, feelings and experiences as a member of the study group, and had incorporated my own story earlier, I became aware of the absence of my self in writing about the collective themes. I had not included my own experiences or even drawn quotes from the interview transcripts relative to my own life. This was a puzzle to me. I realized that I had created an objectified distance between myself and

the participants, despite my best efforts to include myself fully throughout the research experience. Although I did not fully understand the dynamics of this process, I believed that I could not, at that point, expend the personal energy required to review the information and situate myself more directly in the theme analysis. This was a conscious choice made near the end of a personally demanding research project. I am reminded of a highly personal and emotionally-charged research experience about obscene phone calls conducted by Stanley and Wise (1983b) which they terminated in part due to the painful effect on themselves as women. To do feminist research with its attendant emotionality and subjectivity also includes recognizing and honoring personal boundaries.

This internal reflection about method, and the eventual writing of this chapter, were some of the most arduous aspects of the research process. The resulting written format attempts to reconcile the many voices which play a part in establishing a chapter on methodology for an academic work. For this reason, this chapter is lengthier than originally intended. However, such an emphasis on the annotation of the research process is prized by feminist researchers such as Mies (1983), Nielsen (1990) and Stanley and Wise (1983b). The latter articulate their view that "...the process of research must be central to any account of 'feminist research'" (p. 196). In some ways, we might also look at the research process as another type of "finding," in that, we learned a great deal about doing research and we have interpreted and recorded that learning.

Two major aspects of the research process are incorporated here: (1) the methodological considerations based on the literature and ethical requirements and (2) the actual research process developed with feedback from the participants. For the sake of clarity, the theoretical and experiential are somewhat dichotomized and the process itemized. However, in reality, there was a constant interplay between the academic research knowledge, which prepared me initially for the study, our shared experience as the study actually unfolded and a return to the literature for renewed understanding. Spender (1983) speculates about such a retrospective construction.

> There is, however, a danger in telling a tale in retrospect, and it is the danger that everything appears ordered, purposeful, meaningful...not because that is the way they were experienced

> but because in retrospect I can impose and project meaning...and I am still in the process of constructing it. (p. 27)

Her words also imply that the research process as outlined in this paper is only one construction at one point in time. It is my best attempt, with help from the participants, to articulate a fluid and evolving process.

Introduction

> The very notion of feminist methodology is an elusive concept because we have been trained to think in terms of a positivist schema which equates the term "methodology" with specific techniques for gathering and analyzing information...Methodology refers to the *study* of methods and not simply to the specific techniques themselves...examining both its practice in actual research and its underlying epistemological assumptions. (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p. 70-71)

In interpretive research, the emphasis of the study is on the meanings and interpretations of social worlds. Research conducted from a feminist perspective specifically addresses and makes visible the social experiences of women, in this case, women who have been abused. The inclusion of a participatory emphasis, often a part of feminist approaches, additionally incorporates the direct involvement of these women in the research process and assumes a component of praxis, i.e., action and reflection. At the same time, the researcher herself is an integral part of the research experience, rejecting the traditional objective/subjective dichotomy. Such a philosophically grounded theoretical framework necessarily orients the researcher regarding method because "theory and methodology are closely interrelated in a dialectical relationship..." (Duelli Klein, 1983, p. 89).

The dynamic nature of such research makes it very difficult to pre-determine specific methodological choices. Therefore, while I initially considered various methodological implications and was prepared with different options in the original research plan, many changes were made as the research endeavour became increasingly participatory. The subsequent changes determined by and with the research participants were felt to be more congruent with and useful to the participants' real-life experience.

Collaboration

Feminist literature identifies a number of advantages of a collaborative approach to research, for example, ongoing opportunities for feedback (Cook & Fonow, 1990; Duelli Klein, 1983) and mutual decision-making (Cook & Fonow, 1990). In this respect, the process of this study is similar to one described by Cook and Fonow (1990) where "...major methodological and interpretive decisions were shared throughout the analysis" (p. 85). The research project also enhanced opportunities for networking and professional development (Cook & Fonow, 1990) for myself and the other women who identified themselves as co-researchers on applications and resumes for work and school. Some of the stories generated during the research process were also used by the women for other purposes, such as, a graded course assignment and a newspaper article.

However, an undermining complication identified in the literature is recognized in this project as well, that is, "academic standards that favor competitive, individualistic writings over cooperative, reflective ones" (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p. 85). In this regard, I am conscious of the authority, control and ownership that I yet hold because this is a research study which is intended to produce an academic thesis. The study has been conducted largely on my time table and I have done the academic writing. However, we have jointly attempted to minimize these constraints by insuring frequent interaction and opportunities for feedback, inclusion of self-written life histories and a shared strategy for future advocacy. As Diane said at the conclusion of the research project: "I feel like I'm really part of it. I feel like I've accomplished something with my story...it'll make a difference."

Exploration

Pilot interviews and observations were initially proposed for two reasons. Firstly, due to the interpretive and collaborative nature of the research as described above, it is very important that the researcher be oriented "...not merely to obtaining answers, but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77). Secondly, such an exploratory encounter would provide practice opportunities in both interviewing and observation.

Therefore, my initial interview with Diane sensitized me to the women's life experience and yielded important feedback and input which led to changes in

the interview format and questions. Likewise, after observing Diane in the Drop-In Centre, we mutually determined that observation of the women in their "leadership" or advocacy roles had limited usefulness for the research question and, for Diane, induced an uncomfortable feeling of being evaluated. As a result, we dropped this strategy from the research plan. The "pilot" subsequently became part of the collaborative and evolving research project and the initial information gained from Diane was included in the emerging information base.

In Mott's (1989) study about the premenstrum, she enlisted the aid of a colleague to interview Mott about her own experience before beginning interviews with the participants. I felt that this might be a useful strategy for myself, as well. Hence, I met with the consulting social worker on one occasion to share my own abusive life experiences, hoping to help me separate my own experience from that of the participants. However, this interview experience did not feel particularly important or relevant probably because, from the outset, I had situated myself quite clearly within the study.

Selection

The basic criterion for selecting research participants is determined by the nature of the research question. In this case, I was seeking an understanding of the consciousness-raising experience. Cook and Fonow (1990) note that an understanding of consciousness-raising can be facilitated through an examination of "...situations that typically produce changes in consciousness..." (p. 75). They cite physical abuse, rape and divorce as specific examples wherein "the rupture with normalcy serves to demystify the 'naturalness' of patriarchal relations and enables the subject to view reality in a different way" (p. 75). I made an additional assumption that women who had progressed through the Three Phase program would be more likely to have an awareness of both personal and social issues. Therefore, the participants in this study were abused women who had completed the Three Phase Program and who have actively participated in social change efforts in the area of battered women through public education or self-help programs. (Pseudonyms are used.)

When the research involves a verbal exchange between participant and researcher, other criteria for selection typically include those who have the time, "willingness and ability to talk about their experiences and articulate their

feelings" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 84). This presupposes a certain level of verbal articulateness and reflective perceptiveness. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), "people simply do not have equal ability to provide detailed accounts of what they have been through and what they feel about it" (p. 84).

As the original research design was based on the grounded theory approach, the method of theoretical sampling as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used in this study. It is a purposive sampling technique and, as such, it is expected to increase the likelihood of a wide range of experience which taps the research question. Theoretical sampling is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as "sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory" (p. 176). This is indicated by concepts that are repeatedly present or notably absent. These authors also inform the researcher that it is incidents, not necessarily persons, that are sampled. Therefore, re-interviewing the same person, reviewing the existing data or re-orienting for the next data collection session are pertinent activities in theoretical sampling. Hutchinson (1988) notes that "the researcher must engage in a constant dialogue with the data in order to establish direction for further sampling" (p. 136).

This means that the first participants selected for interviews should "...provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data..." (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 181). Subsequent interviews, although similar to the first, will also include probes based on the emerging categories, searching for differences, relationships, variations, verification and/or depth. Theoretical sampling, therefore, occurs over a period of time as the researcher becomes more aware of who or what is important to "sample." As Taylor and Bogdan (1984) point out, "the researcher starts out with a general idea of what people to interview and how to find them but is willing to change course after the initial interviews" (p. 83).

The consulting social worker (Derwyn) immediately suggested that I meet Diane because she had been out of her abusive relationship for a number of years, had started the Drop-In Centre and was very active in community advocacy for battered women. Diane, Derwyn and I then worked together to successively select the other three women over a period of six months. We based our ideas on our growing understanding of the question and findings to date. We wanted to find women who would tell us more about what we were learning and be able to articulate it from different vantage points. What would

be the same and what would be different about their consciousness-raising experiences?

As a result, all the research participants were drawn from the same source, i.e., they were familiar to both the social worker and Diane because of their involvement in the two support groups described earlier (i.e., Three Phase Program and Drop-In Centre). As such, these women share the common experience of finding and choosing to participate in a particular group learning process.

Information-Gathering

Three methods of information-gathering were initially proposed: interviews, participant observation and written participant narratives. Through an evolving process with many alterations and reflections, information was actually collected via individual participant interviews, group dialogues, written narratives and a different kind of participant observation. My own reflections and notes were typed in a separate file during transcriptions and recorded during group sessions in a notebook. This form of information-gathering also assisted in later analysis.

Interviews

Interpretive interviewing is flexible and dynamic within a collaborative and reciprocal, possibly even intimate, partnership between the researcher and the researched. Consequently, the interview is more like a dialogue between equals (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Maguire, 1987; Oakley, 1981). Westkott (1990) refers to the "intersubjectivity of meaning [which] takes the form of dialogue from which knowledge is an unpredictable emergent rather than a controlled outcome" (p. 62). Although the interview is relatively non-directive and open-ended, the researcher does provide a focus based on the research interest (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Spradley, 1979).

In general terms, the researcher wants to understand the lived experience of the participants as expressed in their own words (Anderson, et al., 1990; Kvale, 1983; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In other words, the researcher assists the participants to name their own reality (Maguire, 1987). Questions and prompts, therefore, should provide an opportunity for the participant to define what is important for the researcher to find out (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Spradley, 1979). Anderson, et al. (1990) concur: "We need general questions

that allow women to reflect upon their experience and choose for themselves which experiences and feelings are central to their sense of their past" (p. 101). This will require sensitivity to the lived reality of the interview participants and language of the culture.

Careful attention to the language of the social worker and participants during all contacts oriented me immediately to the particular language of the group based on their support group experiences. I began to think and talk in these words and they then became the words used most frequently during dialogue with the participants. In other words, we shared a common language. Even during the writing process, the language used was questioned and modified by all of us in order to reflect the participants' reality more clearly. Eventually, even the wording of the formal research question changed.

Sub-questions or probes generally ask for expanded descriptions or explanations. Once specific information is shared which seems particularly significant to the area of study, this is probed further for greater depth and detail using more specific questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). After checking with the participant to verify importance, probing serves the additional purpose of clarifying the information. Likewise, rephrasing allows the researcher to obtain immediate confirmation or correction about her understanding of the participant's situation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Kvale, 1983). Not only, but the other women, during group dialogues, asked questions such as "can you tell me more about that?" or "what does that mean?" Comments that made connections to other information gained earlier or from another participant were also very helpful. In addition, during conversation with the women, myself or someone else frequently asked "why is that?" or "why do you suppose that's so?" This is supported by Maguire (1987) who encourages the use of "why" questions because they

> ...encourage people to reflect on parts of their lives that they might not ordinarily question or pay attention to. People are encouraged to look at "reality" differently, that is, more critically. (p. 134)

In her study with formerly battered women, Maguire (1987) also noted that the participants felt a need to "tell their story" before addressing the more specific purpose of the interview. However, the purpose of the research, stated explicitly, is likely to guide the story-telling none-the-less. Story-telling is a particularly important aspect in the healing and mobilization of victims of

violence due to the powerful experience of breaking the silence. Mies (1983), also researching with battered women, is very explicit in her support of story-telling as a feminist methodology. She identifies "discussion and 'socialization' of life-histories as therapy, as a basis for collective women's consciousness and as a starting point for emancipatory action" (p. 132). Her remark is reminiscent of the definition of consciousness-raising put forth by Hart (1990a) in which individual, social and action components are addressed. Mies, herself, purports that story-telling can be a method of conscientization.

In debriefing after the "pilot" interview with Diane, we felt that the interview may have been overly focused on finding an answer to the question and not open enough for the participant's own experience. Hence , we decided, not to merely include, but to focus the interviews on the sharing of stories. This would also serve to further validate the emphasis on personal meaning and interpretation and establish the participant herself as the expert on her own experience (Anderson, et al., 1990; Duelli Klein, 1983). The following poignant quote is from an article about oral history as a feminist method.

> In learning to speak our experience and situation, we insist upon the right to begin where we are, to stand as subjects of our sentences, and to hear one another as the authoritative speakers of our experience. (Smith cited in Anderson, et al., 1990, p. 95)

Subsequently, the initial interviews were fairly unstructured except for a general explanation of the research question using the cultural language* and a suggestion to begin with "your own story of abuse." I explained to each woman that she could start and end at any point that was important to her and tell it in any way that made sense for her. This particular group of women is very experienced in this regard because advocacy requires an ability to articulate their personal story. As the stories unfolded, it was very important to include encouraging, sensitive and empathetic remarks and non-verbal cues during this sharing experience. Often the women would touch upon an area which reflected an emerging theme or which related more directly to the research

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* For example, "What is it exactly that happens so that some women move from that place of being a victim—and I've been there and you've been there—to where somehow we now perceive ourselves and act on a belief that we're an advocate?"

question. Usually, I would share part of my own or another participant's experience as it related to this area, indicate that it seemed to be a common theme and ask for more explanation if it also seemed relevant to her.

The second interview followed a similar format to the first but was intended to gather further information which contributed more depth to the data. Typically, the second interview began where the first interview ended in the story. It tended to be somewhat more focused, however, and included more contextually relevant questions and an exploration of patterns that arose in the first set of interviews. Due to the lengthy period of theoretical sampling, the interview sequence was not orderly. First and second interviews overlapped each other. For example, Diane's second interview occurred before Shelley's first interview. In fact, only one individual interview was conducted with Shelley because I had already heard her verbalize her story of abuse in other contexts.

Some writers caution the researcher that, due to the nature of such personal and difficult disclosure, the participants may become visibly emotional during discussion of their situation. Emotional expression is not contradictory to the research endeavour and is, in fact, supported by feminist researchers (Anderson, et al., 1990; Duelli Klein, 1983; Mott, 1989; Oakley, 1981). "...Feminist research does not deny or discount the subjective but rather seeks to validate the private, emotional, interiorized intimate world" (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p. 73). Further, Anderson, et al. (1990) state that "a story restricted to action and things is incomplete" (p. 98).

Expression of feelings is to be expected, welcomed and should be acknowledged, validated and sensitively incorporated into the interview. Given my background as a social worker, these skills are fairly well-developed as are rapport-building skills. The participants were also very adept at validating and empathizing with each other. As recommended by others, however, I was prepared for instances when the interview should be terminated or when the emotional state and current needs seemed to require therapeutic intervention (Mott, 1989). In this case, it was decided that the participant would be referred back to Derwyn for follow-up of this nature. As I had anticipated, this was less likely to be a concern with these women who had already experienced significant therapeutic support and who have an ongoing relationship with the support groups. In fact, although some interviews were indeed emotional, it was not necessary to do further follow-up.

The researcher herself may also become emotional during interviews and observations (Mott, 1989; Oakley, 1981). This also is highly compatible with feminist research principles. For example, Maguire (1987) argues against the traditional social science separation between feeling and knowing. She notes that "to strive for a detached stance puts the feminist researcher in a contradictory position...[which] expects her to describe other women's oppression while ignoring her own" (p. 88-89). Sensitive self-disclosure is also encouraged in feminist research (Mott, 1989; Oakley, 1981).

The participants were given a choice of interview location. Three of the women chose to be interviewed in her own home while another felt more comfortable outside the home; she chose the agency on one occasion and the researcher's home later on. All three group sessions were held at the agency. All individual and group dialogues were taped. Debriefing at the end of each session included a review of the information covered, summary of major ideas and their relationship to other information obtained (i.e., emerging themes) as well as an opportunity for the participants to comment on the interview experience and add further information or insights.

Group Dialogues

DuBois (1983) states that

> ...discovering and uncovering the actual facts of women's lives and experience...is also a communal, not an individual, task..[It is] here that we begin to elucidate the inherent patterns of significance that can lead to a truly grounded theory about women. (p. 110)

Mies (1983) makes similar comments about the collectivization of experience and then specifically suggests that "the emphasis on interviews of individuals at a given time must be shifted towards group discussions..." (p. 128). Hart (1990a) refers to this as a process of "mutual self-reflection."

As suggested by these researchers, following the first interviews of this study, it became apparent that the full meaning of the women's experience might be understood in greater depth through a group dialogue. This seemed to make sense from a number of perspectives: individually, they had all begun to reflect upon their previous group experiences, there were notable commonalties among the stories and the women were interested in talking together. Therefore, we mutually decided to hold one group session at the

agency. Subsequently, we agreed to meet a second and then a third time to pursue areas that had not yet been covered. In fact, the third group session was initiated by Diane and Shelley.

As mentioned, the women felt particularly excited about the group experiences. I speculated that the powerful nature of this communal experience was facilitated by three important factors. Firstly, the women, including myself, are all experienced group members, know each other and are committed to both personal and social change. Secondly, the process of an intimate, equal and joint feminist exploration had already been established in the individual interviews and previous experiences with support groups. Thirdly, the women themselves articulated the power of the group as follows:

> S: I think it's easier to get more ideas out in a group.
>
> J: Yeah, 'cause we feed each other.
>
> D: And sometimes you say something that you wouldn't say on your own 'cause you don't know if it matters, if it's valid...where a group gets you in touch with what you either had hidden or forgotten or just said wasn't important...[We] needed that contact and equalness and validity, maybe.

The collective power and non-hierarchical nature of the group was enhanced by two important factors: (1) the ability of all the women to be sensitive listeners and supportive to each other and (2) both Diane and Shelley's skillful and intuitive ability to facilitate the group process; Diane was particularly adept at validating and explaining whereas Shelley tended to draw out information by questioning, challenging and paraphrasing. During the first group interview, when the discussion focused on children, Shelley, who is presently childless, assumed a leadership role in gathering information.

Narratives

Some researchers, such as Taylor and Bogdan (1984), recommend using text written by the participants as an adjunctive form of information gathering. In his literacy work, Freire (1990) discusses writing as an instrument to objectify internal realities so that they may be understood and analyzed more critically. Likewise, Mies (1983), describing an action research project with battered women states:

> The systematic documentation of their life histories has the effect that their own subjective biography assumes an objective character. It becomes something at which they can look from a certain distance. They are not only prisoners of their own past and present sufferings... (p. 134)

In this study, the participants decided to write stories about their own lives incorporating their experience of abuse. This was specifically intended to minimize researcher control in reporting their stories and accentuate the authority of their own voice. It also served to enhance their participation in the formally written work.

An unexpected aspect of the research process was the women's experience while writing their stories. Shelley and Diane, who are both interested in writing, began working on their story immediately. Diane reported, and Shelley concurred, that "I found it really hard, and yet I found it really good." Diane, who has vocalized her story in many public contexts, noted the difference between sharing her story verbally and writing it. She surmised that the spoken word doesn't "come back at you;" it is spoken "and then it's gone." In contrast, "seeing it in black and white" forced her to look at it directly. She spoke about "facing the demons again" and feeling "really vulnerable." She was also concerned about safety and believability. The women's unedited and undissected stories form a significant portion of the research findings. In retrospect, this difficult process might have been shared and debriefed more fully in a group session, rather than in ad hoc informal conversations, and used more specifically as a method of reflection and analysis.

Participant Observation

Oakley (1981) describes how she established and maintained friendships with the interviewees after a study about new mothers due, in part, to sharing mutual experiences and providing needed information. Nielsen (1990) cites Freeman's study of the women's movement, which "depended heavily on her involvement in the movement" (p. 6), to highlight the potential depth of researcher involvement. She itemizes a number of Freeman's activities including her attendance in "both formal and informal meetings" (p. 6). She concludes: "The work was multimethodological and required the researcher's personal involvement" (p. 6). Nielsen calls these forms of involvement, participant observation. Immersion in the culture of the participants assists the researcher to more fully understand the meaning of their experience.

Equally important is the opportunity for integration of praxis and research which is clearly articulated by Maria Mies (1983).

> According to this concept, the 'truth' of a theory is not dependent on the application of certain methodological principles and rules, but on its potential to orient the processes of praxis towards progressive emancipation and humanization. This potential, however, is not acquired in the sheltered world of academic institutions but in participation in social processes and in reflection about them...Woman scholars...who struggle against patriarchy as a system, must take their studies into the streets and take part in the social actions and struggles of the movement. (p. 124-125)

These observations have direct application to my own research experience. At Derwyn's initial invitation and ongoing encouragement, I became serendipitously involved in a variety of activities related to battered women, often in conjunction with the research participants. These included regular attendance at the Drop-In Centre (which included participation in mutual planning, facilitation and advocacy), participation as a community volunteer in the Three Phase Program and public education. Although these activities were not originally intended to be part of the research study, the information gathered and emotions generated in these contacts became inextricably linked with the information obtained from the research participants in other ways. Situating myself in the community in this way may also have contributed to dismantling the traditional research hierarchy and decreasing the distrust of researchers typical when oppressed groups are interviewed (Mies, 1983; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

It is important to note, as well, that although I initially entered the situation as a researcher, I soon became immersed for more personal and political reasons. After only a short while, I no longer perceived myself to be an outsider or an observer, but rather a member of a community of women who experience violence and wish to eradicate its many forms. We share a common story and commitment that cannot be separated from the research project. My ongoing contacts in these activities, particularly with Derwyn, Shelley and Diane, therefore, clearly demonstrate our research praxis.

Ethics

The well-being of the participants must be of prime importance and the first consideration of every methodological decision. For this reason, research with human participants requires careful attention to ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, right to refuse or withdraw, and full disclosure.

Confidentiality

The privacy of research participants must be protected by ensuring confidentiality. For this reason, pseudonyms were used in field notes and the thesis report. In order to emphasize participant control, the participants chose their own pseudonyms. Names which refer to family members or locations were replaced with first initials during the transcription of interviews and written work. Tapes, transcriptions, stories and notes were kept only in my home. During transcription, special attention was paid to the location of the tapes so that the content was not inadvertently overheard or played by others.

Some of the tapes were transcribed verbatim. Field notes, transcriptions and audio tapes were only reviewed by myself. At times, the participants reviewed a transcript of her own interview. Copies of the first two group interview transcripts were provided to all participants prior to the third group interview. At no time will I share with anyone any of the original materials. Usually, tapes are erased and transcriptions destroyed at the completion of a thesis, however, these women are commited to further work based on this research. Therefore, tapes and transcripts will be kept, with their written permission, in a locked filing cabinet, until the participants determine their usefulness (for up to 7 years).

In writing the theme analysis, which incorporates quotes from each woman and her unique experience, there was careful attention to removing or changing information that could identify her with care taken not to substantially change her story. The women were asked to review the written work for their consent and to make changes. They also chose to write their own personal stories for inclusion in the thesis document. As such, each woman decided for herself the amount of disclosure and self-identification she was comfortable in sharing. As it is likely that persons who are familiar with these women and their personal histories will wish to read the thesis report, the women were repeatedly reminded that anonymity could not be assured. This is not a particularly relevant problem for these women who have repeatedly chosen to publicly

acknowledge their stories in order to break the culture of silence and advocate for others.

Informed Consent

Initial introduction to the study and myself was made by Derwyn who knew many potential participants through the two support groups. Prior to any formal research, I spoke with all of the suggested women by telephone or at the agency.

At Derwyn's recommendation, formal consent was not obtained from the agency as was originally envisaged. Agency consent was considered inappropriate because the women were all participants of the Drop-In Centre which they co-sponsor themselves, i.e., they are not considered to be clients of the agency. The research purpose, anticipated methods and ethical safeguards were verbally outlined in each of the first interviews. Verbal permission to audio tape all interviews was also obtained. As the study unfolded, participants initiated or had input into changes of direction and method. At the culmination of the project signed letters of understanding were obtained from the study participants which additionally requested permission to keep the raw data.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The participants were meticulously assured of their right to refuse to participate in the study without jeopardizing their participation in the support groups or other agency services. Similarly, because there was never a clear idea of how long or how much time would be required, each woman was often reminded that she need not feel obligated to participate every time she was asked. All the women participated in the individual interviews, all three group dialogues and wrote their own stories. Two of the women were more actively involved in critiquing and changing the thesis document although all the women were consulted. Additionally, the right to withdraw from the study at any point for any reason, without penalty or hurt feelings, was reinforced verbally.

Full Disclosure

Full disclosure is inherent within informed consent. Complete explanation of the research purpose, process and reporting of the results was provided in verbal and written communication. This was an ongoing process and further explanation was required as the aim or direction of the study changed. Research participants will also have access to the research results and reports. This will be accomplished, in part, by providing copies of the thesis report to

each participant and the agency and by offering to speak to the Drop-In Center participants at the conclusion of the study.

Interpretation

Within the original research plan, the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was the anticipated method for data analysis. Indeed, some of the more interpretively-oriented tenets of the grounded theory approach remained relevant. For example, in her summary of grounded theory coding procedures, Hutchinson (1988) suggests a circular process whereby "...the researcher simultaneously collects, codes, and analyzes the data from the first day in the field" (p. 133). This reflects the common view in most forms of interpretive research that analytical reflection and information collection proceed concurrently (Rheinharz, 1983). In this research experience, there was little distinction between one phase and another as the participants and I almost simultaneously shared stories, saw and developed emerging themes and labeled them in ways that made sense for us. Strauss and Corbin (1990) speak directly of the intuitive component required in this type of interactive analysis.

> Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data...to the attribute of having insight...the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't. (p. 41-42)

However, they ignore the possibility that the participants are equally capable of such insight and have a vested interest in sharing in the analytic process.

Admittedly, the major themes seemed to arise without a consciously systematic format. Therefore, when the unanticipated process of shared analysis was complete, it was still my intention to return to the grounded theory method of systematic coding. However, I experienced an increasing sense of reluctance and discomfort. To me, it seemed unnecessary and even unethical to now remove myself from the established participatory format of the research and analyze the information through some other independent, and supposedly more valid, means. Instead, once again I found validation from feminist researchers.

The crucial importance that is ascribed to the telling and hearing of women's stories, was developed earlier in this chapter. At this juncture, it is an important reminder because the first set of findings, that is, our individual stories, require no further analysis. They stand on their own as a witness to our struggle as battered women. It is these stories that most engage and motivate the women themselves. For them, the research process offered an opportunity to articulate their stories so that others may understand and be mobilized to act. The self-written versions of these stories are presented in Chapter 4.

The initial collectivization of the oral stories into pertinent patterns was initially my task because I had the opportunity to hear across the individual stories to the collective themes and patterns. However, further analysis and validation was shared by the research group, mostly during the group dialogues. It is this process of information analysis that must be understood in order to contextualize the findings presented in Chapter 5.

Probably the most significant factor in a feminist approach to information analysis is directly related to an integral concern about the interrelationship between language and meaning (Anderson, et al., 1990; Rheinharz, 1983). Anderson, et al. (1990) believe that "the critical step was to learn to listen in a new way" (p. 103). Because such listening demands an understanding of the language used by participants to reflect their experience, Anderson, et al. (1990) advocate continual probing for self-definitions.

Both Anderson, et al. (1990) and Rheinharz (1983) identify the importance of some form of content analysis which is largely conducted by the researcher. Although they do not clearly state how this occurs, they refer to an awareness of the common themes which prevail across the information obtained. Rheinharz (1983) describes this synthesis.

> ...Pieces of information are compiled, reduced and examined for their interactions (patterns) and basic themes. The more significant is extracted from the less significant within a system of meaning. Parts are strung together to make new wholes—simplicity is sought beneath the complexity. (p. 182)

She warns, however, that the analysis should remain contextualized. In her view, "there are no rules for data analysis except one—that the analysis draw heavily on the language of the persons studied, i.e., that it is grounded" (p. 183). This remains pivotal even when the researcher returns to the literature for

further understanding. Rheinharz (1983) then mentions that "the analysis proceeds with participation from the research subjects" (p. 183). Involvement of the participants is somewhat more clearly identified in participatory research approaches in which participants assist in the development of "generative themes" (Maguire, 1987).

In our study, it was important to interview each woman alone so that her individual story could be understood in-depth with little interpretation or interference. Common themes emerged readily from the first interviews. In some cases, experiences were uncannily similar and were grouped into categories for deeper interpretation. Often, during interviews and groups, I or another woman would ask for such an interpretation or analysis. For example, when I reported that a violent incident which occurred in a car was shared in all the individual interviews, the women immediately reflected together on the meaning of such a poignantly repeated experience.

Therefore, although I initially presented a synthesized focus, the group dialogue and mutual exploration led to an exciting experience of looking more deeply into what we had learned to that point. We were interpreting each others' interpretation of reality. Together we looked at the information in new ways and new insights were revealed. Through this discursive process, we attempted to find a shared understanding of the meaning of their experience as they had moved from victim into advocate positions. It was a cyclical process that moved between the individual stories, that were brought in and built upon, and the collective themes.

Our dialogue became an oral text from which we developed a shared narrative. Eventually, after also revisiting the literature, three major themes were named that seemed to be descriptive of the process of consciousness-raising as interpreted by me from the perceptions of the participants.

Authentication

Authentication, or trustworthiness, asks the question "How do we know that our findings reflect the participants' reality?" When the researcher aims to understand the social world of others, the simplest way to assure credibility is to ask the participants if their reality has been represented appropriately (Guba & Lincoln, 1983). In feminist and other forms of participatory research, such verification is "built into" the research process by the ongoing involvement of the

participants themselves (Rheinharz, 1983). As Diane says: "It's my story." Additionally, theme analysis was a shared experience. Throughout the interviews and group dialogues, emerging ideas and themes were mutually reviewed, validated and developed further. Dialectically, the collective themes were further validated by their relationship to the individual stories and vice versa. In addition, Diane and Shelley met with me specifically to review the written document to ensure that we had a common understanding of the research process and findings. They felt confident that their experience had been well-represented.

Another method of assuring a fuller, deeper account of the findings is often referred to in qualitative research literature as "triangulation." Triangulation refers to the use of "a variety of data sources, different perspectives, or theories, different methods, and even different investigators...to cross-check data and interpretations" (Guba & Lincoln,1983, p.327). Simply, it is "the use of more than one research technique simultaneously" (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p. 82). Stanley and Wise (1983b) suggest that various activities become "evidence" in understanding a larger picture from smaller pieces of information. Cook and Fonow (1990) believe that "triangulation is an especially appropriate feminist strategy" (p. 82) because using a variety of techniques increases the opportunity to gather information that might be missed with certain techniques. In this study, many modalities contributed to triangulation:
(1) interviews, (2) group dialogues, (3) narratives and (4) participant observation. These various means of gathering information incorporated both individual and group interactions, verbal and written communications.

While most would agree that interpretive studies are not generalizable in the sense that a quantitative study is assumed to be, there is a belief that some degree of transferability of information can be obtained if enough "thick and rich description" is available. This includes meticulous description of the context so that other readers may make a judgement about the applicability of the findings to a similar context of importance to them. The amount of detail in the written record should provide an almost vicarious encounter for the reader (Guba & Lincoln, 1983; Rheinharz, 1983).

Stanley and Wise (1983b) make a similar argument.

> We must make available to others the reasoning procedures which underlie the knowledge produced out of 'research.' We must say *how* we find out what we do, and not just *what* we find

> out...It involves us in a disciplined, scholarly and rigorous explication of the bases of our knowledge by tying in such an explication to a detailed analysis of the *contexts* in which such knowledge is generated. (p. 196-197)

They develop this further by including an ethical element which is especially pertinent in feminist, or other forms of collaborative, research.

> This is because without including an account of this process the sources of the researcher's knowledge are hidden from scrutiny. We don't know how or why she claims to know what she does...here the power relationship between researcher and researched remains fundamentally unchanged and unchallenged. (p. 195)

Within this chapter, considerable effort was made to clearly identify the research process as experienced by myself and the participants. Additionally, our stories provide contextual information about our life experience.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the research process experienced during this study. I have indicated the circular, often confusing process of making methodological choices and changes throughout a project that is grounded in a theoretical framework which supports interpretation, participation and action by and with the research participants themselves. A review of the procedures used in participant selection, information collection, ethical determinations, interpretation and authentication serves to assure that ethical standards were met and to identify for others the approach that led to the findings.

CHAPTER 4 — STORIES

Introduction

As stated earlier, in feminist research, the everyday lives and experiences of women are often given voice through the use of stories. In this sense, this chapter presents the first set of research findings, i.e., narratives of our lives. I begin this chapter with a summative introduction to the participants, which they have read and endorsed. Following Maguire's (1987) example, I have included excerpts from some of the interviews from this study because they give a clear indication of the multiple forms and effects of abuse. More importantly, each women's own voice follows.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the first interviews elicited each participant's personal story or life history relative to the research question. In many research documents, the researcher prepares a synopsis of the oral texts as an introduction to the participants for the reader. In this research project, I suggested that the women write their own stories for inclusion in the thesis document. In this way, each participant, including myself, would retain the authority of our own voice by making independent choices about protection of identity and the focus and format of the written presentation of self. It was also a way that each participant could contribute to the written document in her own words and style. This was discussed with the women in the first group dialogue and they all agreed that this approach would reflect their own contribution and autonomy to the research endeavour more fully than other alternatives. A story of approximately two to three pages was agreed upon.

Diane and Shelley, who had started writing early, shared their writing experience with the others during the third group dialogue. They had discovered that it was a useful but frightening process. They were confronted with unexpected memories, heightened emotions and new insights. For example, Diane discovered that her long-time dislike of candles was an emotional reaction to unconscious memories of heating baby bottles with candles when her husband disconnected the power. Both women, referring to the writing and their emotional reactions, found that they couldn't "shut it off once it starts." Hence, they wrote long narratives which incorporate much of their thoughts and feelings at the time of writing.

In order to honour this unexpected part of their research experience, we agreed to incorporate the longer stories into the thesis document for those who

wished. Therefore, Shelley, Diane and Joan offer the reader a more detailed and intimate look at their lives in the appendices of this document. They hope that this will serve to emphasize the plight of battered women. As well, they intend to use these stories as a starting point for a published work of their own.

I have also included my own story. To disclose myself in this way was a very difficult decision which stretches many personal and social boundaries—those which support the silence of violence, those which reify objectivity and those which avoid risk in hopes of safety—all of which have protected me at times so that I might survive. I am challenged to expand these boundaries in order to conduct this research in a style which exposes my vulnerability as a professional, as a scholar and as a woman. This is not a risk that I have taken lightly. Stanley and Wise (1983a) make a similar observation.

> Undoubtedly, to locate oneself within research and writing *is* a hazardous and frightening business. Vulnerability is always frightening because it can be, and often is, abused or countered by bland invulnerability. Women know this perhaps better than men. (p. 180)

Therefore, this attempt to situate myself personally in an academic work was a process of great and sometimes painful proportions. At times, it has been overwhelming and, at other times, stimulating. To include my own written story magnifies this vulnerability. It was an important choice, however, from a number of perspectives. Firstly, including my story reinforces my participation in the research project as an equal member with the other women, not particularly objective, neutral, or outside the process.

> ...Feminist women [scholars/researchers] must deliberately and courageously integrate their repressed, unconscious female subjectivity, i.e., their own experience of oppression and discrimination into the research process. (Mies, 1983, p. 121)

Secondly, it illuminates the prejudices or patterns that I bring into the process and analysis of the research. Thirdly, it allows me to write in a style that is more personal and emotive than the academic format used in the rest of the document.

The Participants

The four women range in age from 28 to 43, were in their relationships for 8 to 17 years and had left their abusive marriages from 1 to 8 years previously. None of the women had post-secondary education. During the course of the research, Joan was doing high school upgrading while the others were employed in administrative support positions. More recently, Shelley has started part-time study at a local community college with a view to studying social work, Diane plans to enroll in the same program next fall and Joan began full-time attendance in a nursing school. All of the participants suffered various forms of abuse from their husbands even after leaving them, have been involved with society's legal and social service systems and are committed to advocacy in one form or another.

Diane and Joan were victims of severe physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and economic abuse for about 15 years.

> He threatened to hit me in the stomach before the baby was born 'cause he didn't want it. And then after the baby was born, he didn't wanna give me any money for clothes or formula or anything because [he thought] it wasn't his son. (Joan)

Both, undereducated and isolated, were housebound for most of their marriages. Both were almost killed by their husbands the day they left the abusive relationship.

> He kept me in the house basically, other than going to work. He was raping me and had the gun and was turning it on me for like, four days and nights...I <u>knew</u> he was gonna kill me. It may not have been that morning—it could've been the next morning or whatever. (Diane)

Today, both are vocal, assertive advocates for themselves, their children and other women. In addition to public education, Diane started the Drop-In Centre and was has been a co-facilitator in a battered women's programs.

Shelley described financial, emotional and psychological abuse which includes name-calling and other forms of humiliation, withdrawal/refusal of affection or personal contact and threats of physical violence. She reported being fearful and angry for most of her marriage.

> Well, [my new colleagues] were up and they were happy...positive. And they, you know, express all these wonderful bright ideas. And

> you, of course, kinda get up and in with the flow. And you bring it home and you try and rub it off on him. And it's like squish city [includes sound and action of squishing]. So, he has to stomp all over you to bring you down to where he can control you. Whoah, down, down, down.

At the time of the interviews, Shelley had only recently completed the Three Phase Program and had been out of her relationship for just over one year. She has found new energy and excitement about sharing her story through public education activities, assisting in the formation of a second Drop-In Centre and becoming a co-leader in groups for battered women.

Cindy's long-term marriage included physical and emotional abuse.

> I guess the worst part also, maybe not the worst, but he did get physically abusive with me...I guess, at one point, I realized that all my, that anything that I believed in personally was taken away from me. All my morals that I felt that I grew up with and believed in were taken from me. That was one of the worst feelings I ever had...Like my own point of views, how I felt about something. They were different from his and I was wrong and—(laughs). And, well, that's what it turned out to be like. I was wrong and I was this and I was that, you know, all the name calling.

She has ongoing pain about her young teenage children's decision to stay with their father in caretaking roles. She recently remarried. Cindy, a more quiet and introverted woman, provides one-to-one support to others, discusses abuse in her workplace and has volunteered in the Three Phase Program.

My Story—My Way (Shelley)*

My life on 1 page—this is an impossible task! My first attempt at this ended up being 6 pages of continuously running sentences—single lined, no paragraphs, with the margins being pushed out as far as the printer would go!

I am now starting to understand that who I am today all began with my early childhood and immediate family—parents and siblings. This was where I was taught to know the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, happy and sad...what these things are as society accepts them to be anyway! My person was being molded from such an early age to appease others. I like to compare a child with a blank piece of paper, whatever you as a parent write on

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* Submitted in writing by participant.

this paper will then be with this child, to a certain degree, for the rest of its life. Good and bad. How I would relate with other people, how I would perceive male and female roles, how I felt about myself, what I thought love was, all began with what my parents, older sister, and then younger brother and sister wrote on my piece of paper. I understand that my parents did the best they could with what they had but, in my eyes, they were somewhat lacking in the supportive, validating, emotional end of the spectrum. I feel that that had a lot to do with why I was in such need of the attention and "love" (for lack of a better word) that I seemed to get when I met M. at 18.

He was tall, dark and beautiful (a word I like to use sometimes in reference to men, if only to see the reaction!), somewhat dangerous and exciting. As it turned out, more dangerous to my mental health than I could have ever imagined. Slowly, subtly, abuse, non-physical abuse, began taking place. I did what he wanted to do instead of what I wanted to do, I went where he wanted to go instead of where I wanted to go, I dropped my friends one by one because he didn't like them and made it miserable for me to see them until there were only his friends left. All the while I was softly hearing this little voice inside of me protesting against this attack on my person but brushing it aside with the idea that we'll do what I want later. Well later never came! Every time I tried to assert myself to get what I wanted he would make it so completely impossible for me that I would finally just back down and give in—his control, and he knew it! Over time, I learnt to tune out that little voice so I couldn't hear it any more (suppressed but not dead) therefore I wouldn't have to deal with me or my conscience. I could then concentrate on him and how he was thinking and feeling and what he was going to say and do next—the trap!

I started to gain weight using food as a means of feeling something! M. would tell me that I was fat, ugly, nobody else would want me, useless, he was the only one who would ever sleep with me, no one else would love me, along with the infamous I never cleaned the house well enough, I didn't cook like his mother, I didn't do the dishes to his satisfaction, I spent money without his permission even though I had my own full-time job, on and on...After many years of feeling totally inadequate, isolated, unhappy, brainwashed, I started to get mad, not verbally at first, for safety reasons, but in my head. I started listening to that little voice inside of me that I had tried for so long to tune out. I would disagree with him, tell him off, call him names, scream NO when he would crawl on top of me just after we had had a fight, cry Yes when he showed

me any kind of real emotion (which was extremely rare). This was the start of everything I had wanted to say for years but was afraid to express because of his threats of taking away his "love" and that nobody else would ever have me. What kind of love is that!?!

I had wondered for some time what it would be like to be divorced. Did I really love this man that I hardly ever saw anymore because he worked out of town and continually reminded me that he chose his work above me at all times?! Then the big one, I didn't even know who this man was anymore, I didn't know who I was! I was getting stronger and stronger, beginning to be able to voice some of those inner disagreements to him more often, not as afraid of his threats and abuse. When it all finally came to a head and after much beating around the bush on his part, he finally told me that he wanted a divorce. He had been waiting for me to come to his rescue and ask him if that was what he wanted so he could just agree and not actually have to say it. But I didn't ask him and therefore he had to take the responsibility of saying it himself! I was not surprised by his statement, I somehow knew that that was what he was going to say. I told him that I also wanted a divorce. He looked at me like a stunned animal caught in your headlights. He had been waiting for me to fall apart, to start bawling and beg him not to leave. When I didn't, it really threw him. I finally owned my own power, he had no control anymore over my mind, my feelings—over me!

He tried to manipulate me many times after that until finally, after he had ransacked the house and removed all my papers, statements, house documents, personal journals, I drove him to work one morning, came home, packed up 1/2 the stuff and moved out—without his permission! He had told me that I could not leave until he had 3 of his big friends there to watch so nothing would leave the house that he didn't want to leave. All this, and much more not mentioned here, after he had told me that he wanted a civil divorce!

Only once I was out of the situation did I realize how brainwashed I had been. Then began the exhausting, frightening, sad, confusing, angry, exciting, painful, exhilarating work of healing and growing—then began SHELLEY! I've recently decided to continue on with my education after being out of school for over 11 years and go into the social work field for I have experienced the power of discovering oneself and wish to help others do the same. My belief now is that our lives are spent learning, about the world around us, about other people, about ourselves, and if we stop for any reason other that our own death, then

we are simply existing amongst the already walking, breathing dead. I have come to the conclusion that I want to teach other people what I have learned and continue to learn from my own and other battered women's experiences so that we all can write better, healthier stories on our children's blank pieces of paper and eventually have a brighter, non-battering or non-violent future!

I don't think I will ever find anything more stimulating than the experience of my own LIFE!!

Me Then and Now (Diane)*

My name is Diane, I am 44 years old and have been out of a 17 year abusive relationship for 8 years. I have three children; a daughter who is now 22 years old, two sons, one aged 19 and one aged 17.

My relationship was abusive from the day I met this very charming, handsome, exciting man. However at the time, I was not aware of the different forms of abuse. The only form I recognized was the physical/hitting/punching. The other more subtle forms were not known to me. My ex-husband was a controller from day one. As the relationship progressed he became more and more controlling, finally ending up being **brutally** physically abusive. The emotional/psychological abuse permeated every aspect of the relationship. After each child was born, the physical abuse increased. This, I discovered much later, was also part of the control issues he was dealing with. As I spent more and more time with growing children, he felt more threatened and his way of regaining control and total dominance was physical abuse.

As the kids began growing up, testing limits, speaking their minds, having opinions that differed from his, he also began to control them. Although he did not outwardly physically abuse the kids, the threats of violence, mind games and name-calling and put downs were horrendous. At the time, I believed that only I was being injured, emotionally and physically, by his behaviour. I was totally unaware that the children, by being present in the home and witnessing and hearing the abuse, were also being drawn into the "black hole." (I call this situation the black hole because, as I see it, it is seemingly endless darkness, cold [void of positive emotional support] and very difficult to escape from.) The children were learning that abuse is OKAY and normal. That men were

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* Submitted in writing by participant.

superior to women, that children carried the least influence of all. From our home, this attitude and conditioning would be carried into their homes, as adults, and so perpetuate the cycle of violence. The only way out is through counselling, group therapy and support groups.

As I saw signs that my children were being affected, I started to make moves towards escaping with them. This planning stage took me years to complete, and even when I was totally under his control, I was still planning that there had to be a better life out there somewhere. One of the subtle and most damaging forms of abuse is the emotional and psychological. I found this the hardest to overcome. Every time I was called names like slut, whore, fatty, stupid, lazy, my self-esteem was surely being eroded, bit by bit, until I came to believe that I could not survive without his support, **love**, understanding and **direction**.

Yes, I said love. That was very hard for me to grasp. How could someone who professed to love me so much possibly ever think of harming, never mind possibly killing me. The threats of harm to the children were the last straw, it was not long after that I told him I wanted to leave with the kids. He told me that "if he couldn't have me, then no one would," that he would kill me.

It took 5 nights of terror to force my move out of the house for the last time. He repeatedly threatened me with a gun, and "played" sex games. During this ordeal, all I wanted to do was get the gun and kill him, before he killed me. That opportunity arose, he went into an alcohol seizure and I took the gun from his hand, but I did not kill him. All I could think about was how to get the kids and myself safely out of the house for good.

I have left the relationship numerous times, too numerous to think about, but each time I either went back or invited him back. I was not strong enough to make it on my own **yet**. After leaving that final time, I was put in touch with a social worker from Community and Family Services, who was commencing a 24 week, structured, support group for abused women. It was while I was in this group that I began to understand that I was not to blame for being abused.

As I grew stronger and stronger and began to really understand the dynamics of family violence, I grew more and more determined to save my children from a lifetime of pain and suffering. My children each went to counselling, as did I, and we have not been back in that relationship again.

This may sound over simplistic, but I try not to dwell on the past, but look forward to the future. After leaving the relationship (as I mentioned earlier it has been 8 years) the violence has not gone away. It is true that it has subsided, but

it is also ever present. My ex-husband is not about to admit that he is violent, nor is he about to seek out help for the control issues and dominance that he seems to require to feel good about himself. He must come to the realization that he is the only person who can change his behaviour and until he **chooses** to understand and believe that women and men are equal in value, intelligence and integrity, he will never move on to a fulfilling future. But that is his story.

My hopes for the future lie with the children. When violence stops in our homes, then the children will learn by living that love does not hurt, that love is light, warm and free; the very opposite of my "black hole."

This attitude and idea will also be passed on to their children, because children learn not only what they are formally taught, but also what they see (interactions between parents), feel (free to express their thoughts and ideas) and hear (words that are loving, kind, praising as well as disciplining).

It Can't Get Much Worse (Joan)*

Most of my life was spent growing up on a farm outside of [a small town]. From a young age, I remember my father hitting my older brother and my mom. My dad stayed home and "baby-sat" while my mother taught school all day. My brother worked with a seemingly nice young man and one day invited him to come home for supper. Well, you could say it was love at first sight and soon M. was a border at our home. He was 19 and I was 16 and we started to experiment with sex. I was afraid of getting pregnant but he told me not to worry, he'd marry me if that happened, and ever since I was a little girl, all I wanted was to be a mommy. After six months of playing with fire almost every night, I got burned. I soon had to quit school because I felt very uncomfortable being pregnant in a Catholic high school.

We were married in 1974, and two months into the marriage, M. beat me and raped me one night when he was drunk. I didn't realize it was rape until years later because I never believed a husband could rape his wife. That rape made me so depressed that I was sick through the whole pregnancy and weighed 120 lbs. when our son M. was born. When M. hit me in the mouth, he said to me "I

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* A longer version of this story was submitted by the participant and positioned in the appendix. Joan asked that I shorten her longer story for inclusion in this chapter. This was accomplished with the help of two other participants.

should have hit you in the belly." He also had told me that if the baby was a girl, it would stay in the hospital. When M. was two months old, I totally lost it. I disowned him as my son while we were in [another small town] visiting M.'s family. It was Remembrance Day and all this blood and death on T.V. and on the farm was too much for me to handle. My mom and brother came and took my son and I back to G. where I went into hospital for three weeks.

Over the years, he got more and more violent with me and our four sons especially after we moved out to a farm. He would get mad and knock me to the ground and then kick me in the back with his steel-toed boots until I could barely get up and he would tell me "Joan, you don't know what a beating is. I gave a man a beating in 1973, in [a large city], and he never got up."

When our youngest son started school, M. told me that I had to go and get a job, or I would have men in the house because there was no one there to tattle on me. I said "Fine, on one condition, that I can save for a house" because we were living in a shack. He said "Sure." All I had was my Grade 10 but I managed to get a job as a baker's helper. When my first pay cheque came, I asked M. for grocery money. He said "No, you've got money." And I had to use my pay to buy food. Soon I was buying all the kids' clothes, paying for their school and gas for the car.

When I was accepted for a job at the hospital at $9.50 an hour, I took it. I thought it would be better at the hospital because I would be working with 30 women in the kitchen. But when my first pay cheque came, it was $1400.00 as compared to the bakery at $700.00. Pow! He hit me when I got that pay cheque. He had to knock me down to size, you know. Working with all those women, I learned that not all men beat their wives.

On the night of my 32nd birthday, he came home drunk at 3 AM and I asked "And where have you been?" because for months if I would come home even 5 minutes late I would be accused of having a quick one with one of the maintenance men at work. He would lock me out of the house and not allow the boys to let me in. And when I would get in, he'd say "We all know what she's been doing." And I started to see through my sons' eyes that they were starting to believe him, which really hurt. The boys remember him calling me a slut, whore and bitch. But I remember him calling them "You little bastard!" right in front of me.

That night he pinched my nose so hard while I was lying in bed that he took the skin right off my nose. He grabbed my left breast so hard that I had bruises

for three weeks afterward. He punched the wall above my head while I lay there in fear. He ranted and raved until 5 AM and then went to the washroom. While I was eating breakfast, he told me that I wasn't going to work, I was going to screw [somebody else], that I was just a whore and a slut and a bitch. I just ignored him, as best as I could. I managed to get him to let me out of the house to feed the dog.

And, while I was out, I went and started the car. I locked the car doors for some reason and sat in the car waiting for it to warm up. Very soon, he was at my window, with no coat or boots, just his socks and work clothes. I opened my car window, just 2-3 inches it seemed, and he stuck his arm right in and grabbed the keys out of the ignition. I knew he had me. So, I opened the car door and asked "What do you want, I have to get to work?" Well, he started to slap my face again, and said "You're not going to work, you're just going to screw." I finally got mad and slapped his face with the back of my left hand and the wedding band on my finger cut his lip. He put his hand to his mouth and then looked at the blood on his fingers. Then he went mad. He lunged at me, because my car door was open, and twisted my body onto the front seat, face up. He then started punching me in the face and jaw, breaking my nose and almost breaking my jaw. He then grabbed onto my throat and started to choke me until I couldn't scream or even breathe. I said "Take me. Just take me." When I lost consciousness, he let go and got off.

He got off of me and I sat up in the passenger seat beside him. He told me to wipe my face and so I checked my coat pocket for a tissue, but couldn't find one. So I told him "Just let me go to the house and wash my face." He wouldn't let me out of the car until I gave him my other set of car keys. I went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror and said to myself "Well, he sure did it this time. I'm going to have a hard time hiding this." He gave me one set of keys and, as I walked out the door, he said "No police better show up here."

I managed to drive to the hospital and do my breakfast toast and the dishes afterward. At coffee break, the women all told me to go up to emergency and so I did. The nurse took over when I told her I was afraid to go home. She told me I should see a doctor and asked if she could contact the Crisis Worker. I said yes. Soon the boys and I were on the bus to a shelter in Edmonton. We stayed at WIN 2 [a shelter] for three weeks and then moved to Wings [a second stage centre]. My mom came to help me and the boys. If it were not for her, I would

have gone back to M. in the first six months. But she protected me until I was strong enough to be on my own.

Soon, I was back in school doing my upgrading. And now I am in a school of nursing. I still have the three younger boys. The city was too hard for the oldest to get used to but he is doing fine in P. and has been dating the same girl for two years and is coming 19 soon. I feel my life can only get better because it can't get much worse.

There Can Be A Happy Ending (Cindy)*

> "Because abuse is so negative, I wanted to keep [my story] positive to show there can be a happy ending, I guess."

Today I can honestly say I'm a happy person. Feeling good about one's self is truly a wonderful experience, one I thought I would never have again and which took a long time and a hard struggle to regain. I am a survivor of family violence. It all took place for most of my 15 years of marriage, if not from the time we were just dating. I married my "first love" and we had 2 children. It started out as verbal abuse which was very emotionally and mentally upsetting. Eventually it turned into physical abuse. The outside scars would heal but the pain and scars on the inside were unbearable.

The children felt the pain of emotional and mental abuse also. This was the foremost reason I found the courage to leave. Not only my pain and suffering but the suffering the children were enduring was far too much. They were teenagers at this time and had their own stuff to deal with plus that of our fighting, etc. They asked me questions: Why do I put up with it? Why do I let him do things like that? Can't you stick up for yourself and us? And I had no answers for them.

I felt beaten, battered and broken—a nobody.

When I left, I perceived that my children would soon be with me but as it turned out, they figured it best to stay with him—someone had to look after him. I guess they took over my role. My visits with the children became less frequent as time went on. They told me it was too hard on them to see me anymore; they would be harassed for days after one of our visits. Through my own experience I understood—and they wouldn't listen to what I had to say. He had eventually

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* Submitted in writing by participant.

turned my children against me. The final and most hurtful thing he could do to me. I have not seen my children for 4 years now. I pray that they are safe and that one day we'll be together again.

I had turned to alcohol to rid myself of the pain and fears. The alcohol became my power. This ended up making me feel worse—no self-esteem, no self-worth. Then certain people came into my life and helped me find the right path. I found AA and a power greater than myself and alcohol—a higher power. I realized if you need help, it is out there. I found help through AA with fellow alcoholics and also through an abused women's support group. It was good to know that I didn't have to go through this stuff alone. I had to have an understanding of my problems and what I've been through. The best way to do that is to share with other people who have similar experiences.

Through my AA meetings, I can share my story and hopefully it will help some other women to know she's not alone and that there is help, to help her find the courage to change. Changes are good for us. I used to be afraid of change but now I look forward to changes in my life. If we are not good to ourselves, how can we be good to anyone else?

I have made a new life for myself (now that I have the tools for living), married a wonderful man who believes in me and am surrounded with unconditional love. My sisters say I am an inspiration to them. Many people have told me how proud they are of me. So for me to be able to hang on to all this that was given to me so freely, I have to give it away. I respect my wholeness today, I will help another woman nurture hers.

Situating Myself as a Subject: Facing the Mirror (Donna)*

From the inception of this research project, I have felt a desire, a commitment, to situate myself "within" the research, rather than as a traditional researcher who studies a phenomenon "out there." As a battered woman myself, I was constantly faced with a mirroring effect during the study that was often very painful, whether during reading, sharing in interviews or involvement in the Drop-In Centre. But now, as I near the end of this process, I , like the other women, find another hurdle to pass—the writing, in "black and white" as

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* My written submission.

Diane says, of my story. This is an exposure, a vulnerability that is frightening yet freeing.

I was faced with violence very early in my life. In fact, I have a picture of my mother while she was pregnant with me wearing a black eye. My father was a violent and severe alcoholic. He was physically, emotionally and economically abusive to the entire family but mostly to my mother. I was very afraid of him all the time but very defiant anyway. I married an older man when I was 22. He is a very accomplished man in many ways, sensitive and concerned about people. But like many men, he had somehow learned that he had the right to control women, even if it required emotional manipulation or physical force. I spent 13 years with this man, living with the name-calling, the put-downs, the humiliation of being spit at or kicked, the fear of always doing something wrong and many times agreeing that I had! I often did not have the words to articulate an idea or a concept, so I was belittled and made to feel wrong. After awhile you just stop being you.

I thought about separating many times; we both did. In fact, like many others in our situation, we did on a number of occasions separate for a few days or a week but we'd always get back together to try "one more time." One day, I went to a workshop for adult children of alcoholics and discovered that my husband is an alcoholic! I had no idea that addiction to alcoholism could look different than my experience with my father. This was the beginning of the end. However, about a year later, my husband and I went on a very romantic holiday and enjoyed each other's company very much. Or so I wanted to believe. During the entire 2 weeks, I was afraid to tell him that I had agreed to facilitate a personal development program that would take my attention away from him for substantial periods of my free time. I knew he would have a fit and I was right! I finally told him when we returned. He proceeded to denigrate the entire holiday experience, using many attempts to control me. Emotionally, I had had it. I withdrew and eventually went to counselling and, one day about a year later, I just simply made a decision to leave.

When I left, I didn't know for how long it would be or if I would return. I never did. That was 3 1/2 years ago. I found that I was much more relaxed and at ease with myself. I began to realize how much fear I had been living with every day. I didn't ever want to go through that again. My husband made many attempts to "win" me back over the next year but I could then see that they were all forms of control. And I wasn't having any part of this anymore!

I returned to university and gained an education that I surely did not expect. My introduction to feminist and critical social theory literature was exhilarating. Finally, a language I could relate to. An analysis that made sense in bold and global ways. And I learned that violence in the home is not a "domestic" matter. I opened my eyes and saw the oppression experienced by women on many levels, and the many levels of oppression when race, class and other marginalizations are added to gender. Even though I have now left my abuser and am "free" from this tyranny, I am not free from the tyranny of an unfair and oppressive society which operates on patriarchal, and capitalist, principles.

I was terrorized, although briefly, by a man I was dating when he followed me home late at night after a date with another man. He believed he had the right to attempt to control me in this way. I never saw that man again. His ability to control me doesn't exist but the fear of living daily in the world as a woman does continue to control me and I hate it. As I became emotionally involved with another man, my vigilance was extreme. I know that this is required for my survival, at least for now, but the energy required to maintain it is excessive. I know that this will be the case in every relationship until I feel strong enough to never be a victim again and the victimization of all women is eradicated.

Summary

I have no doubt that the reader is touched by these powerful stories. Many readers will recognize their own situation in the reading and be confronted, as I was, in difficult and painful ways. I also imagine that one can see the similarities and patterns across the stories even though they are all different. I have often tragically joked that there must be a manual out there that abusers all share! It is not the intention of this research, however, to study the cycle of violence or the victimization of women in the home. Rather, we wish to illuminate the process of hope, the experience of consciousness-raising. Therefore, in the following chapter, patterns and themes are drawn from the individual and collective stories to portray a consciousness-raising process.

CHAPTER 5 — THE CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING PROCESS

Introduction

> In the collectivization and discussion of their individual experiences, the women transcend their narrow isolated horizon and begin to understand that women in general have a common social destiny...[They were] struck by the similarity of their experiences, i.e., the commonness and monotony of the everyday violence. (Mies, 1983, p. 135)

In this quote by Maria Mies, she voices my own shock at hearing frequent repetition across the individual stories. Even though the four women are different and unique in many respects, their stories of abuse are strikingly similar. However, not only the pain of their victimization, but the power of their survival and advocacy also encompass many shared experiences.

The latter are the focus of this thesis. During the interviews, it was immediately apparent that, for each woman, both individual and social understandings had changed and that both individual and social actions had been facilitated. Further development of these concepts, in interaction with the literature, assisted me to organize them thematically, using the participants' own phraseology as follows:

(1) "An awakening"— The women became aware of a changing consciousness about their individual lives, including a sense of internal strength and power not previously experienced.

(2) "The societal thing"— They incorporated an emerging social consciousness that allows them to analyze their own and others' abuse differently.

(3) "Advocacy"— Each of them has taken specific actions against the violence in society.

An Awakening

Firstly, much of the content in the individual stories indicates a changing internal consciousness that was most palpable during the months which preceded the women's final choice to leave their abusive relationships. Diane's use of the metaphor, "awakening," during the first group dialogue immediately

resonated with the other women and became representative of a shared concept thereafter. The sense of an awakening was illustrated most strikingly in three shared conceptions: (1) the recollection of one highly significant violent incident, (2) concern for the children and (3) contact with other people, particularly women.

Violence. Unsolicited, all of the participants related one exceptionally violent incident to me during their first interview. In each case, the experience was vividly recalled in extensive detail. Joan was particularly expressive, contributing sound and gestural demonstration to punctuate her verbal description. As a group, they speculated that the event was particularly significant for a variety of reasons. For instance, the women recalled being terrified by their husbands during this event, whether this occurred before or after leaving him: "I knew he was gonna kill me" or " it was the first time I thought he would actually hit me and I wouldn't be around to tell about it." Also, after years of having their sanity, their intelligence, their inner truths battered and almost destroyed, they suddenly recognized that they were not to blame. Cindy and Joan made nearly identical comments when they recollected their realization that "he is the crazy one - not me" or "I'm sane, he's crazy...he was killing me so he was the one who was basically crazy." This flash of insight strengthened their self-believability and heightened their concern for their own safety. Cindy surmises:

> Why we remember it so vividly is we said this is the last time. If you're gonna do it, do it to the best of your ability 'cause you'll never do it to me again.

Their awareness and resolve is highlighted in the calmness which pervaded their actions immediately after the abuse. Although dazed and afraid, possibly experiencing both physical and mental shock, they thought clearly and acted with determination; "it was just so calm, so deliberate." Both Diane and Joan went to their jobs, made arrangements to go to a women's shelter and ensure that their children understood what was happening. Joan relates her calm return to the house from the car to "wash my face." More surprisingly perhaps, she expressed concern about her husband's inadequate dress in cold weather. Cindy went to a hospital and filed a police report. Shelley returned to her home and organized assistance to remove her belongings immediately. Shelley and Diane speculated about this phenomenon.

D: But it's done with calmness. It's not done in a flurry of emotions and— I was emotional afterwards, after it all sunk in and I knew I was safe and the kids were safe. Yes, it was very emotional.

S: I think it's also survival, survival instinct.

D: Yes, survival instinct, maybe that's what it is.

These women seemed to be referring to a shift in their belief about themselves; a shift from victim to survivor. They now perceived themselves to be capable of determining and initiating actions that would ensure their own and their children's safety, in other words, survival. No longer were they focused on their partner's needs, beliefs and actions, which distracted them from their own basic needs, rather they almost dispassionately committed themselves to their own survival.

Three of the violent incidents that were shared during the first interviews had occurred in a car. Diane later related an incident which had also occurred in a car. Again, the women were asked to interpret the significance, if any, of this common theme. Firstly, the women identified their sense of entrapment in the vehicle.

S: Well, I was driving. And so I couldn't jump out of the car, I couldn't let go of the wheel. I mean, I could've stopped but, of course, when all these things are going on—

D: And what can you do? You can't just pack up and leave because he's still in the car!

S: Yeah, exactly and he wouldn't get out of the car.

D: ...And he sat there and he threatened and screamed and hollered and pounded on the dashboard and on the windows—

S: —on the roof and you're waiting for it to come over here.

D: Yeah, exactly, waiting for his hand to spring out and get you.

In contrast, they also believed that the car was related to their own increasing sense of independence and power. At the same time, they knew that their husbands were threatened by this. Joan speculates:

> Well, for me, the car was a threat against him. That was my escape...my sense of control and freedom was behind that wheel. And he knew that. I mean, if we feel it, they feel it, too.

Children. For some time before leaving, the three women who had children also began to see their children's pain and potential futures more clearly. They all worried about their children's exposure to role models that would perpetuate the cycle of violence in the next generation.

> And I was gonna raise four men who were gonna grow up and beat up their wives and kids and think it was okay, perfectly okay. (Joan)

Joan was also confronted by her four sons' increasingly abusive behaviour towards herself and each other. In contrast to their children's abusiveness, each woman also became conscious of their children's protectiveness. Cindy talked about her children's ingrained sense of responsibility towards their father.

> Okay, when he'd talk to the kids, he would tell them he doesn't want to grow up and be a lonely old man, that he needs them to look after him. So, I guess, they think it is their duty.

Joan reflected on a situation in her husband's family which she perceived could be a "life sentence" for her children, as well.

> I didn't want, like his mother staying with his father and he was abusive. But she had her boys, she had one of her sons live with them, the husband and wife, till the old man died...I didn't want a life sentence for my sons. I didn't want them to have to be my protectors. Sons shouldn't have to do that for their mother.

Each of the three mothers, also grew increasingly concerned about their husband's abuse of the children. Diane sadly related how she missed important clues, at first, that may have warned her of emotional, physical and possibly, sexual abuse of her children. Joan was also afraid of her own abusiveness towards her children. Even though she hated being abused herself, the culture of violence which had permeated her upbringing and marriage had almost enveloped her.

> We had a belt, a strap, and I strapped the boys once in a while 'cause he told me that's what you have to do to raise boys. So,

> once in awhile, I'd give them a strap. And then, one time, one day—I don't know what [my son] had done—but I took the strap and I was, basically, back and forth on his legs, beating him...I says "this is it; this has gotta stop." Within two months, we were outa there.

The younger Shelley purposely chose not to have children because she "did not want to be a single parent." She used this term metaphorically because she believed that her husband's physical and psychological distance would leave her solely responsible for the children even though they were married.

The preceding comments clearly indicate that each women's growing concern for their children's emotional and physical security was an important factor in their new awareness. As Diane stated: "It was just another thing to make me say that this is not right.

Contacts. All of the women recognized that these new understandings which contributed to their leaving were precipitated by contacts outside the home. Most pivotal was their contact with other women who had a significant impact on them, but for differing reasons. Both Joan and Diane had returned to the workforce after many "housebound" years. From their women co-workers, they gained a notion of the wrongness of their abuse...

> When I was working at the hospital, [there were] women who tried to influence me, to tell me that that was <u>wrong</u>,'cause they saw the bruises. (Joan)

...and a sense of a different world, different possibilities.

> J. used to phone the office regularly to make sure I was at my desk. We'd go out for lunch and they'd make excuses if I wasn't in the office...That gave me that opportunity to see what the outside world was like. So, they were my first support group and I didn't even know it. But that clued me in that there's a life out there. And that's when I started, I think, unconsciously planning that I wanted a piece of this. I didn't want to live in this cave anymore—I wanted to be out there in the sunshine. (Diane)

They described the support they obtained in a variety of ways. Joan reflected that Diane's office mates "gave her a chance to spread her wings." Diane, in turn, surmises that both she and Joan got from others "the view that it can be done," i.e., that they could make it on their own. Diane acknowledged that "I got some sense of strength from listening to the other women." Shelley

appreciated the positive outlook of her colleagues as she "met new people and got new ideas."

The women articulated this as the beginning of a change in their worldview and their view of themselves. Subsequently, each began to "test out these newfound freedoms," to exhibit "defiance," to challenge their husbands in small, subtle ways, learning some of the safer ways to do so after receiving violent reactions initially. For example, Diane attempted to defy her husband's chosen dinner time, of 6:00, by 15 minutes. When this was met with abusive behaviour towards her, she responded with determinedly silent defiance.

> So, I'd go "6:15" and Smack! Well, next time I didn't say that. He'd say "when's supper?" And I'd say "right away." It would still be 6:15. (appreciative laughter)

For her, this seemingly small action was empowering. Diane clearly articulated, however, that as she became more independent, her husband became more desperate in his attempts to control her, leading eventually to his attempt to kill her. After a horrifically abusive period, this finally resulted in her decision to leave.

Although Cindy and Shelley had experienced a similar phenomenon, they also related an almost opposite experience with other women. Both of them were witnessing an abusive relationship of a friend and sister, respectively. Cindy states: "And I started to dislike her because the more I seen of her, the more I seen of myself in her." Shelley, on the other hand, became angry at her spouse for berating the behaviour of her sister's boyfriend while conducting the same behaviour himself.

Both types of situations might be described in terms of a mirror. The supportive women in the workplace provided a reflection of Joan and Diane's rights and choices while the friend and sister reflected their own denied abusive reality. Again both indicate a changing consciousness, a different way of seeing the same reality. Their situations had not changed but, as they became aware of numerous contradictions and choices, their view of themselves in the world was altered.

All of these retrospective speculations, when viewed thematically, share common elements pointing to an new consciousness which emerged despite the continued domination and control of these women by their abusive partners.

At that moment of truth following the final act of violence, they saw themselves as important enough and powerful enough to make a different choice. Although they could not have articulated this at the time, they now have the ability to name the experience more clearly. Excerpts from this dialectical reflection between Diane and Shelley clearly highlights this point.

> D: I think it was this awakening in me that I have control, I have some power to do something for me...You know, I had an awareness about me that I hadn't had previously.
>
> S: (A bit later) I think it's the assumption of your power, you finally regain control of your power. I don't know if the word control applies.
>
> D: I don't even know if it was regaining control of my own power, it was an awareness that I had some. For years, I felt I had nothing and it was like I had some. It wasn't like "whoah, I'm okay." It was like "no, I don't have to do this."
>
> S: A belief that you had the choice.

It is this sense of personal power and strength that these four women most clearly articulated and acknowledged during the research process.

The Societal Thing

The second category which emerged in these stories is the development of a social consciousness which includes a new sense of collectivity. This germinated during their initial connections with other people in their work situations. They became aware of the contradictions between their experience and that of others. Joan, for instance, observed that the baker whom she worked for did not treat his wife cruelly and, in the hospital, heard other women talk about going out after work or getting home late. Diane became aware that late suppers or lunch dates were not always met with violent consequences. Cindy was admonished that she was carrying more than her share of the work in the job she was supposed to be sharing with her mate.

The women also experienced the value of support and connection with others. Joan was somewhat awestruck by her co-workers' offers of assistance, even to the point that "a few of them wanted to hide clothes for me and be my shelter." The women surmised that they felt safer and less threatened talking to other women partly because women would talk about feelings and basic needs,

or, as Shelley says, "life essential stuff." Diane summarizes: "When I went to work, I didn't even realize that the women in my office were my first support group."

Their sense of mutuality was further facilitated when, at some point not long after leaving their husbands, each of these women became involved in either the Drop-In Centre or the Three Phase Program and sometimes other group experiences as well (e.g., AA). It was here that they saw that other women shared their experience of abuse, their pain and their fear. They felt validated and supported. All the women made comments such as those repeated here by Shelley and Cindy. "You look around the room and one person's talking and look around the room and everybody's going like this [nodding head]." "When someone speaks about their experience, they're helping others and they're helping themselves at the same time. So, I mean, everyone there is getting help...[You] know that you're not alone."

As well, they began to recognize the pervasiveness of violence towards all women, not just themselves. The first indication of this societally shared experience occurred during their initial telephone contact with the social worker. Most of the women indicated surprise at hearing their abusive lives so correctly itemized by this person who knew nothing about them. Later, by seeing and listening to many other women, they slowly realized that "abuse is not your fault; you are a victim" and that abuse of women is a problem in society that is "bigger than you and I."

Diane, like the others, clearly attributed this new social analysis to her involvement in the Three Phase Program; "...until I'd been through the Phase thing, I didn't realize it was a societal problem." In the last group dialogue, she articulated how this awareness developed for her.

> I thought for a long time there was something wrong with me, I wasn't good enough. And that's why I tried so damn hard to be better and perfect, you know, in my relationship. And it still didn't work. And then when I got out and I saw all these other women that were in the situation but they weren't like me—some of them had less money than I had, some of them had a lot more money than I had. Some of them, you know, were tiny, little, petite, pretty things and some of them were bigger than I am. And so it didn't matter who you were...So that's when I realized that this was across the board.

Throughout each woman's story and the group dialogues, they wove comments indicative of an awareness of the societal context which supports their abuse. Shelley was particularly adept at identifying this component in even the most seemingly personal vignettes presented by the others. Often, she would confidently interject a comment about "the societal thing" to remind all of us about this pervasive and powerful aspect. Subsequently, the phrase was employed by others to evoke this particular concept.

Each of the women could identify patterns in their own and their spouse's families of origin which supported messages that men, supported by violence, hold power while wives and children do not.

> And then every, about once a month, I guess, [my father] would hit my mom or whatever. And so I grew up believing that it was normal for a husband to beat his wife and son... (Joan)

> Like, my mom wasn't in an abusive relationship. My dad was, he made the major decisions...But, I think, he could've become abusive had my mom (pause)...Oh, definitely the patriarchy was in operation but he was like a benevolent dictator kind. (Diane)

> [My ex-husband's mother] is abused, I think. Maybe physically once in awhile, I'm not sure. But, verbally, she was at that time anyways. She was a nervous wreck. (Cindy)

Often family or women's role issues were analyzed by the group as a form of control over women when Shelley interposed challenges such as: "Is that the societal view of the family?" For example, the concept that it is the woman's responsibility to keep the family together and the tendency for women to be validated by their husband's status are, according to Shelley, "crap."

Then, looking beyond the family, the women recognized other societal and historical messages that supported women's subordination. Again, Diane articulated this very clearly.

> I think the social side has a really strong connection to battered women. It keeps us down. It keeps us in a lower level of society...I mean, history alone has dictated that men can do these things. Women were men's property....Boys are still taught to be aggressive and it's okay to be rough and tumble and have fights in the playground. And girls have to sit there with their knees tight and their dresses pulled down and, you know, be quiet and smile pretty.

Using more explicit language, Shelley voiced a similar view.

> Out there, in society, it's still not a favourable attitude—that men are brought up to have a male attitude and power and control and manipulation and oppress women. And that women are supposed to be the caregivers and smooth things over and sit pretty and shut up and fuck me when I need it and be tough when you're supposed to.

Economic dependence was the focus of considerable discussion in the first group dialogue. The women acknowledged that "money is a big thing" which contributes to their isolation from others and dependence on their partners. All of them, whether working or not, knew that their spouse's control of the money "gives them power to, power over...It's just another way of putting you down, making you feel...degraded." Moving between the private and the public, the discussion shifted from the private humiliation of wearing old and oft-repaired underwear to the public statistics which indicate women's economic status in society. Shelley knew "a lot of women, in my family, who stay with their man because they have dependents or they're financially stuck." In the third group dialogue, the women picked up on this theme again and discussed the low social value and financial insecurity of housewifes and mothers. Shelley summarized:

> It used to be money would give you power. But it's money and education that gives you power now. And it just seems easier for men to get money and education.

These women have interacted extensively with social, legal and medical systems. They repeatedly gave examples of their victimization by these social institutions and their socialized willingness to "give your power to these people." Over time, however, the women began to recognize themselves, instead, as valued equals, despite their structural economic and educational disadvantages. The following excerpts from a dialogue about professionals indicates both their recognition of the societal power which is arbitrarily granted to professionals, particularly men over women, and their efforts to demystify this power.

> S: I think society plays a role in our view of the professional because they are successful, they make the big bucks, they make the big decisions.

D: ...These professionals are just people.

C: Who make mistakes, too.

D: Yes, who have worked hard to get where they are but they are not perfect...So, if that's the only information I can leave with the women that come to the Drop-In Centre or my presentations, I mean, I'd be very happy. And then you get women thinking for themselves and not believing that this doctor or lawyer is god. [I ask: "Why do we have that attitude?"] Because it's so mysterious and a lot of the doctor-patient, psychiatrist-patient, the lawyer—the terminology, I mean it's [gestures above her head] mysterious. It's because we, I , as a patient wasn't well enough informed to know the terminology that he was talking about. I didn't think I had a right to question.

S: Yeah, I think it's a mistaken trust. Just give them trust. That's not—you have to earn that.

D: Yeah, we just automatically think these people know everything and are doing the best for you...it's really a societal thing again...Women again think that they're second class, they're lower...And men have always had power over women when they're in these professions.

Once removed from their isolation and exposed to other women, to other ideas and to the support groups, these women began to gather support and strength and to identify contradictions and constraints imposed on them by a patriarchal social order. Some of the women, notably Diane and Shelley, identify and articulate the social component more clearly than the others. For Joan and Cindy, a deepened understanding of personal and family issues is enough to mobilize them into action.

Advocacy

Action, the third element in the consciousness-raising process, is termed advocacy by these women. Although this theme is separated from the other two for clarity and emphasis, I am aware that two dialectics operate in this category that indelibly connects it with the others. Firstly, I was cognizant that the women's actions could not be separated from their emerging awareness. It seemed that action was the concrete realization of the interaction between their changing personal and social consciousness. It could be referred to as praxis, i.e., the action/reflection dialectic. I also quickly learned that these women have an innate understanding or recognition of the early feminist axiom "the personal is political." Even when they identified social systems, they personalized the

experience. Additionally, they attributed equal importance to changing their families, communities and social worlds. For them, advocacy is something that is expressed "in my everyday life." Yet, it is highly political in that they envision a changed world. This could be understood as the personal/social dialectic.

In this excerpt from the second group dialogue, Diane, who is the most visible and experienced of these advocates, offers an enlightening glimpse into the dynamic interrelationship between the personal/social and reflection/action dialectics of advocacy.

> I'm not sure if it's a responsibility to others; [it's] more of an obligation to educate. Because I was in the dark and I thought my abuse was for me. I was doing something wrong and it was just in my backyard..I deserved it somehow... [Briefly reviews her initial contact with the Three Phase Program.] But I learned really quickly that I had some responsibility in this and that would be looking after my safety, looking after my kids. But I wasn't to blame for any of this. So, it was pretty quick that I knew I wanted to do something for other women and that started the Drop-In Centre right off the bat...[It was] rewarding to see other women sort of say "yeah, you know, it isn't my fault he hit me. It's a criminal act." And going on to some of the very basic things that run through abuse and tear them apart, and the myths, and just throw them away...And then from there, I started doing public education and I co-facilitated Phase I, II and III...And I just feel that I have an obligation to a few women who really helped me. And if I can help a few, you know, it's like "you tell a friend and they'll tell a friend and they'll tell a friend." And that's the only way we're gonna attack this society thing.

All of these women have definitively acted as advocates in various contexts. Shelley insightfully noted Joan's quick advocacy on behalf of others immediately after leaving her husband. Joan later stated: "I just wanted to maybe make a difference in someone else's life, for the better."

> You know, when I left that little community...I let as many people know that I was gone. That way the word gets around and these women say "well, gee, she left, maybe I can leave, too."

During the group dialogues, the others would frequently applaud Joan for her dedication in forging a new life for herself and her children, most notable in her obvious personal strength and her educational commitment. Likewise, Cindy shared the following feedback from her sister.

> My older sister...calls me her inspiration. She says: "When I'm really down, I just think of you, how far you've come and I think 'if she can do it, I can do it.'" So, it's nice to hear things like that, you know, and to know that people—even though they are mostly family or your friends or whatever—they're listening and learning that there's choices...

From these and similar examples, the concept of role-modeling was frequently introduced. As Diane noted: "I mean, it's just changes that we've done to ourselves, but that's a role model for somebody." Particularly important for these women was that children, their own and others, are exposed to egalitarian and non-violent role-models. They strongly believe that the family is the starting place for any real change. "If my kids change, then their kids will be different and it goes that way. And so, we're looking at a society change of, maybe, you know, 20 years down the road." Diane proudly related examples of her sons' non-gender specific roles in the home and described her daughter as an advocate in her own right now.

Diane and Shelley have both facilitated in battered women's groups. Cindy participated in the last section of the Three Phase Program as a "mentor." This support for other women is seen as another form of advocacy. Public education and lobbying efforts are ways of advocating on a larger scale. All of the women have shared their stories in their workplaces, University and other classrooms and/or in the media. Diane has specialized in advocacy within the justice system. She is a veteran presenter in their various educational programs, i.e., police, RCMP, Victim Services, Solicitor General's Department and crown prosecutors. Letter-writing, participation in rallies and discussions with various other agencies also contribute to their social change efforts. Three of the women also hope that their future careers as social workers and as a nurse will make an impact on the social system in favour of a changing future for women.

Each woman explained why she feels compelled to these types of actions.

> Because I want to change what I can. (Joan)

> You said earlier today that you wanted to help someone because someone helped you. That's exactly why I came and [volunteered in Phase III]. I don't know if it did any good but, I mean, I got a lot out of it myself. (Cindy)

> I'm getting greedier, and I'm impatient, and I want things to go faster because I really do not want any more women than there

> already are in situations where they think they're worthless and they're going to die. (Diane)

> A lot of times it would piss me off. I would get angry because there wasn't enough awareness, awakening among society...That's why I say it angers me that society is just like "If I close the doors then we'll just pretend nothing happens." Fuck off. It's here. And that angers me. So that's the drive there...it's channelling the anger. And I figured out how to do that. Finally. I can handle it. So that's why I'm going to school. (Shelley)

They are also aware of the strength of working together, with their collective anger, to disrupt the power of the patriarchy. As Diane says:

> ...Because if I'm angry and ranting and raving, they can say "she's a looney tune." But you get 20, 30, 40, a hundred women moving, they can't all be out to lunch, they can't <u>all</u> be crazy. There's got to be something to this!...There might be something to listen to here.

What is the vision, the hope that these women hold for the future? This was the subject of considerable discussion in the group dialogues. They envision both personal and social changes. Diane gave an example about changing self-perceptions.

> Women will not <u>take</u> the abuse from men. Women will not <u>allow</u> men to take their power. Because they know a different role now. They'll know that they're capable, they're smart, they can make good judgements.

The following quote by Cindy exemplifies many of the comments made about changing messages given to girl children.

> I believe that the little girls that are, <u>will be</u>, growing up will be more independent. Not being told that they'll be dependent on a husband.

Shelley reminded us that "a lot of [change] starts with educating young boys."

> I'm thinking of men realizing that they do not automatically get this thing just because they have a little thing between their legs. And they're not automatically superior because they got a third leg. I mean, that's garbage. Women have to be assertive, too. But the men have to understand that it's not a given. And they gotta step off the little pedestal here and look me eye-to-eye not on top of my head, looking down at me.

Cindy noted that she had already evidenced changes in parent-child interactions.

> With the groups I go to...a lot of people are, I guess, concerned about their children, like you were saying. And they believe that they can change the pattern of how we relate...It looks like more love, actually, more caring, more listening, and talking, asking how they are. I think that helps.

Using child-minding and household chores as examples, the women envisioned changing the way women and men relate in the home. They hoped for an environment of equality, defined by Diane as follows.

> I mean, men and women are different and I appreciate that; it's quite nice actually. But equality means, to me, value. You're treated of equal value. And my feelings are as good as his and what I say counts just as much as what he says. So, that, to me, is what equality is. It's equal value.

These women know that hope is essential. They fervently believe in "what we are trying to do" and that "our struggles are not going to be lost." Diane passionately proclaimed:

> This is going to change. I am going to make a difference. Be that through my kids, through friends, through Drop-In, through whatever. There is going to be a difference here. Before I die, there is going to be a difference.

Summary

What do these courageous and powerful women tell us about consciousness-raising as an emancipatory learning phenomena? They remind us of both the appalling reality of violent oppression in our lives as women and the optimism of our humanity. They describe a process whereby their consciousness was raised. In each case, an important trigger was breaking the silence and engaging in dialogue with others in some form or another. Contradictions were revealed which caused them to gain the "inner strength" to challenge their situations until they come to a conscious recognition of their own worth and power. In their workplace groups, they gained a sense of the possibility of difference, while in their support groups, they were faced with the oppressive reality of their similarities. In further dialogue, supported by feminist

analysis, they then recognized the societal nature of their private experiences. This precipitated a desire for action. These women are now advocates across a broad spectrum of private and public activities, giving equal significance to each.

CHAPTER 6 — PRAXIS

Introduction

Praxis is the dynamic interaction between action and reflection. This chapter incorporates discussion of both. Firstly, a discussion of the findings in relation to adult education practice, research and advocacy addresses the questions: What have we learned? Why is it important? Where do we go from here? Then, a reflection on research and education relative to knowledge completes the document.

Research as Praxis: Practice

Adult education as a field of practice has historically been commited to marginalized, underprivileged and oppressed groups of people. Some adult educators assert that the emphasis of adult education should be on the eradication of inequality and oppression and the advancement of justice and peace (Burke, 1980; Cunningham & Ohliger, 1987; Freire, 1990, 1985; Maguire, 1987). This is an explicitly value-laden stance held by those who believe that teaching and learning should be a catalyst for fundamental social change and personal/social transformation. Such educators are often inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and others who have embraced and adopted his revolutionary ideas in other contexts. Feminist pedagogy shares many characteristics of this critical tradition but feminists are unique in their attention to gender as an historical basis for inequality and oppression. It is their belief that women form a subjugated group in society based solely upon their gender, and that many women are further marginalized by their socio-economic class, race or sexual preference. Feminist pedagogues share a sense of responsibility to establish teaching and learning practices which assist in the critical analysis of women's place in society and, thus, contribute to social change (Chovanec & Scott, 1993; Hart, 1985; Martel & Peterat, 1988; Miles, 1989; Smith, 1990; Thompson, 1983).

An essential element in these approaches to adult education is the facilitation of critical consciousness, coined conscientization or consciousness-raising in Freirean and feminist approaches respectively. This concept was developed in the theoretical framework and formed the basis of the research question. This study, therefore, has attempted to edify the process of consciousness-raising.

How is the process of consciousness-raising experienced by women who have been abused? In the previous chapter, three interrelated themes were developed to describe the consciousness-raising process as articulated by the research participants. Briefly, these are:

(1) An awakening: a changing consciousness about their own power.

(2) The societal thing: an emerging social consciousness about gender power relationships.

(3) Advocacy: action taken against the violence in society.

Although the findings reported in this thesis were confined to the specific experience of four women who had been abused by their previous partners and who had also participated in two particular support group programs, their words strikingly echo the three components of consciousness-raising observed by feminist adult educator, Mechtild Hart (1990a).

> The full cycle of consciousness raising therefore includes the actual experience of power on the individual level, a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality, and a practical orientation toward emancipatory action. (p. 70-71)

To what extent is there a relationship between personal and social transformation in the process of consciousness-raising? It is impossible to explicitly answer this question apart from the consciousness-raising process just described. Although it is clear that there is an "interaction between social knowledge and self-knowledge" (Nielsen, 1099. p. 30), the form and consequence of this "dialectical tension" (Hart, 1990b; Nielsen, 1990) is a difficult experience to apprehend or articulate.

Within a transformative framework, the notion of a dialectic implies that two apparently opposite, or contradictory, concepts are experienced simultaneously, interactively, and then transcended to create a new and more powerful synthesis. In our patriarchal society, personal and social life worlds have been artificially dichotomized, so that these concepts are viewed as opposite, mutually exclusive domains of knowledge and experience. Hart (1990b) develops this concept specifically in relation to adult education.

> ...The essentially individualistic, apolitical therapeutic modalities that exist today tend to dichotomize the social and the individual.

> Emancipatory education, on the other hand, needs to keep intact the dialectical tension between these two realities and needs to address the individual, deep-psychological distortions in ways which take their social origin in relations of dominance into consideration. This means that critical self-reflection cannot be separated from ideological critique. (p. 133)

To transcend this separation is to create a new consciousness of the world and a new acting upon the world that is potentially transformative (Freire, 1990).

Hart's (1990a) description of consciousness-raising quoted earlier seems to capture the essence of the person/social and reflection/action dialectics which I interpreted from the participants. She articulates the fundamental internal and external changes in consciousness that precipitate and facilitate action. Specifically, the women in this study described a dialectic interplay between their personal and social experiences. An interpretation of the many interviews and group dialogues suggests a circular process that continually shifts between personal and social consciousness and personal and social actions. For example, moving out of the enforced isolation of their homes to obtain jobs in the broader, social world assisted them to view their personal worlds differently. Conversely, by sharing their personal stories, they have effected changes in the social systems that govern them. Through the re-integration of personal and social lives, new realities were realized.

Hart (1990a) further suggests that:

> Consciousness raising is therefore a process of transformative learning because it changes the structure and the frame of experience in general and thus the entire frame of reference within whose parameters the individual woman has been acting so far. (p. 55)

The three-part process description shared by this study and Hart's (1990a) suggests that personal awakenings and social understandings, constantly interacting and mutually facilitating each other, are realized through action, the transcendent component of a changing consciousness—i.e., praxis.

Interestingly, three of the four women in this study (and myself) returned to school after leaving their abusive relationships. This coincides with Mezirow's (1990) research on women who re-entered college programs after a "disorienting dilemma." From their reports, Mezirow developed a theory of personal transformation which connotes an experience of profound personal

change in "meaning perspectives." He believes that through a process of critical reflection, usually precipitated by an externally imposed event (e.g., divorce, death, job loss), individuals transform their previously held distorted beliefs and assumptions about the world. However, he does not attribute the same significance to dialogue as that expounded by Freire (1990) and feminists (Hart, 1885, 1990a). The women in this study, possibly unique because of their group encounters, clearly indicate the importance of breaking the silence by sharing their own and hearing other women's stories.

Further, all of the women in this study have entered college programs that will contribute skills and knowledge that are intended to make a difference in the world (i.e., nursing, social work and adult education). These choices reflect our hope for, and the actual potential for, social transformations.

What strategies facilitate the consciousness-raising process? Facilitative strategies are embedded within the stories and themes which were reviewed in the two previous chapters of this document.

Undoubtedly, dialogic group experiences are essential in the process of consciousness-raising. Dialogue is immensely powerful for many reasons. Sharing publicly breaks the silence that supports the "culture of violence" (Freire, 1990), objectifies and identifies common social experiences and emphasizes contradictions (Hart, 1990a; Stanley & Wise, 1983a). The participants in this study clearly credit the collective power of group support and dialogue for their continued personal and social learnings.

The dynamic interrelationships between personal/social and reflection/action processes suggest the importance of incorporating both sets of dialectics into the learning experience. Firstly, a political validation of the personal is an integral aspect of consciousness-raising. According to Hart (1985),

> ...the personal is not simply 'raised' to the political, but it is disclosed as being endlessly mediated by the political... (p. 122-123)

As the participants pointed out, the return to the personal as a basis for "expertise" caused them to re-think their relationships with professionals, repudiating the authority of the professional (Hart, 1985) and insisting on a more egalitarian approach. Professionals who respect the authority of each woman's own voice and are knowledgeable about the power relationships

embedded in gender issues and the battered woman's experience assist women in their "resolve" to stay away from abusive partners.

Secondly, action/reflection strategies, such as opportunities for story-telling on many levels, are concrete and passionate examples of the personal made public and, as such, contribute to ongoing personal and structural change (Mies, 1983).

However, Hart (1990a) is explicit in her provisos about the use of consciousness-raising approaches. She cautions adult educators about the use of "techniques" which could easily replace a more essential understanding of the principles and historical context of consciousness-raising. She stresses that:

> The power of consciousness raising derives in large measure from its spontaneity and from its roots in a sociopolitical movement of liberation...[It] is therefore a program for social groups that have been considered marginal... (p. 70)

This quote echoes our experience in the Drop-In Centre where the most truly effective decisions have arisen from ourselves as women participants during times of need or crisis in order to aid in our liberation from various oppressive systems. A very poignant example occurred one evening when one of the regular participants was desperately afraid for her own and her children's lives. The group immediately responded with three actions intended to help save their lives: numerous phone calls to the local police detachment, a petition signed by all of us requesting more stringent police safety measures and a visit the next morning to the chief of police. Many women later reported that they had learned a great deal about the power of both individual and collective actions. Clearly, it was not a set of techniques that had facilitated this empowering learning experience but, rather, actions were precipitated by a set of principles based within a distinct philosophical and historical context.

Implications for adult education. Because virtually all adult educators are involved with women learners, many learning environments are potentially fertile ground for feminist or critical approaches to teaching and learning. Many educational programs particularly illustrate the woman learner's position in society. These might include:

- Educational enhancement programs such as job re-entry, upgrading or ESL courses.

• Personal and family development programs which include stress management and parenting seminars.

• Support groups which often have a dual therapeutic and educational emphasis, such as those noted in this study.

In our local community, we find examples of literacy, nutrition, consumer education, re-entry and ESL programs conducted from a critical perspective and often aimed at women learners. Additionally, various programs for women operate specifically upon feminist principles, for example, agencies specializing in immigrant, health and sexual abuse issues of women. With the initiation and advancement of Women's Studies programs on university campuses, there has also been a growing emphasis on feminist pedagogy in the academy. Professors who practice from a feminist or critical perspective attempt to facilitate a process of transformation in their classrooms (Chovanec & Scott, 1993).

There may be implications here for how such programs could be oriented to support women in the ongoing process of consciousness-raising and also to use their expertise and commitment to contribute to the facilitation of consciousness raising in others. Clearly, the philosophy, content and process of the Three Phase Program described in this document facilitated a consciousness-raising experience among the women participants. An understanding of this program, as it was developed and modified by Derwyn Whitbread and others over the past few years, offers a significant opportunity for similar experiences in other contexts.

More specifically, this study highlights abuse towards women. Violence, as a means of domination, intimidation and degradation, is an immediate and tangible threat for all women. The fear of violence or the actual experience of battering is a reality for woman learners. Women experience the dialectical contradiction between power and powerlessness on a daily basis. The participants and I hope that our personal stories of pain and hope facilitate understanding, sensitivity, critical analysis and action for adult educators in any context.

Implications for further research. The implications for further research in adult education are twofold. Firstly, adult education students and practitioners must have a greater depth of knowledge and more support for alternative research approaches in the field. Exploration, documentation and analysis of critical and feminist research methods would substantially contribute to the field

of adult education. In this study, the process of doing the research within a feminist philosophy contributed significantly to our understanding of ourselves as feminists. Because such research cannot be separated from everyday experience and practical action, studies could be conducted using feminist, participatory, phenomenological or hermeneutic methods, in conjunction with learners in many contexts. For researchers based within a critical or feminist framework, research is itself a process of consciousness-raising (Cook & Fonow, 1990) or conscientization (Mies, 1983).

Mies (1983) further expounds on the ethics of social science research. Her stance deserves strong consideration within the field of adult education, that is, that

> research, which so far has been largely an instrument of domination and legitimation of power elites, must be brought to serve the interests of the dominated, exploited and oppressed groups, particularly women. (p. 123)

She, like many feminist researchers, believes that research should involve the researcher in "active participation in actions, movements and struggles for women's emancipation" (p. 124). Much more emphasis, information and support would facilitate an honest critique of traditional research ethics in adult education which ignore this component.

Secondly, research to further understanding of the consciousness-raising experience as a learning process would be invaluable. The action component of the full cycle of consciousness-raising is particularly difficult to understand or facilitate.

> Unfortunately, I think, the limitation of a classroom setting is that we don't go from there to do any kind of political change. (participant quote in Scott & Chovanec, 1993)

Within grassroots organizations, the action component is essential. Therefore, study of such programs which claim a critical or feminist philosophy and intention would offer deeper understanding about facilitating action.

In-depth study of the specific programs attended by these particular woman participants, i.e., the Drop-In Centre and Three Phase Program, would also contribute to an understanding of philosophy, content and process. It would be a significant contribution to the fields of adult education and counselling to understand why, what and how these programs really work.

Interpretive/descriptive or program evaluation studies, with strong participant observation and action components, are suggested.

Research as Praxis: Advocacy

> The truth of a theory...[is] its potential to orient the processes of praxis toward progressive emancipation and humanization. (Mies, 1983, p. 124)

For each of us involved in this study, it is important that these findings be used for further advocacy against violence and toward empowerment. We are committed to disseminating the information in various ways. As Mies (1983) suggests, this kind of nexus implies that researchers "...can no longer treat their research results as their private property, but that they must learn to collectivize and share them" (p. 123). The participants have continually stated that sharing their individual and collective stories are important means of educating and supporting others.

Our primary emphasis is educational. We concur with Cook and Fonow's (1990) statement that "the outcome of research is greater awareness leading to social change" (p. 75). By sharing our stories with others and articulating the research findings, we hope to contribute to our own growth, offer hope and understanding for other women and facilitate needed change. These objectives are exemplified in the following discussion, which occurred after my statement that "it's just a thesis; it's not an earth shattering thing."

D: Well, it could be.

S: It's a growing period for myself

D: But I'm also hoping—and I'm sure you are, too—that when you're done your thesis, that it's an awareness, an awakening for somebody else out there who's clueless.

J: It might make some changes somewhere along the line.

The following are the ideas that the women and I are commited to pursuing:

(1) Publishing: Diane and Shelley have developed ideas to publish the stories and the theoretical material outlined within this document in a book; they have already solicited support from other Drop-In Centre members. We have also discussed doing smaller scale articles for publications about women and

violence. I, personally, believe it is the researcher's responsibility, to the participants and to the field, to publish the findings in recognized journals so that the research may benefit other adult educators or other professionals. Mies (1983), in her description of the research/advocacy process in initiating a battered women's shelter, also validates the importance of publicizing research findings.

(2) Public education: We plan to do a series of presentations, again using our stories as a basis for understanding theory, to the Drop-In Centre, other agencies, University classes and women's shelters. Dobash and Dobash (1988), after conducting their own research with battered women, addressed the importance of disseminating both the information and the theoretical arguments.

> Presenting the alternative message in various public arenas in conjunction with community groups is an additional and important aspect of action research. It involves the social scientist in social and political processes... (p. 67)

We have also considered submitting proposals, in conjunction with the Drop-In Centre, to the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, who fund small scale educational projects, or other such funding sources.

My own commitment to the fields of adult education and social work encourages me to prepare workshops, conference presentations and seminars for professionals, again in conjunction with the participants wherever possible.

(3) Training: We would like to offer assistance to other women who are interested in this type of advocacy. By sharing our experience and expertise as educators with other women in safe contexts, we hope to enlarge the pool of women who can speak confidently and passionately about their individual and collective experiences.

Using circles as evocative metaphors, Diane and Shelley both reflected on the process of praxis. Diane's "full circle" reflects the dynamic and infinite process of learning, educating, learning, and so on. Shelley envisions a rock dropping into a pond, creating ever-widening circles as the "ripples get bigger and bigger."

Reflection

After most of the academic work was done, I was challenged to step outside the research process and to consider my thoughts about knowledge. Indeed, knowledge is central to education, research and even, therapy.

Reflecting on the research experience, therefore, I am aware that I brought considerable life experience into the research situation from multiple perspectives. Each of these facets of myself contributed different and complementary forms of "expert" knowledge to the research endeavour.

Firstly, I am an expert on my own life experience. My life as an abused child and adult woman introduced emotional and personal knowledge to the research, elements that required more energy to sustain but generated more commitment and satisfaction. My own experiences as a "client" in counselling and groups was another personal base from which to draw knowledge. Secondly, I have professional knowledge of skills, theories and experiences as a social worker. I used many skills to encourage and validate the women while at the same time challenging them to interpret more deeply or, sometimes, think more critically about the experiences they shared. This was particularly true during the group dialogues. Thirdly, I had information about alternative research approaches. Throughout the project, I wore the hat of researcher, responsible for facilitating a process of information-gathering and analysis for an academic work, within a participatory, egalitarian framework. And finally, I became an advocate, an activist as the research increasingly developed an action orientation. Again drawing on personal and professional knowledge realms, I could contribute information about social processes and structures.

This combination of knowledge and skills were part of my unique subjectivity upon entering the research situation. I celebrate the philosophies and process knowledge which I own and which allowed me to conduct this kind of research with ethical confidence.

However, my philosophical framework does not allow me to hold my own "expertness" above or beyond that of the other women. It does not supersede or assume prominence. Throughout the project, I was cognizant of nurturing the women's own description, interpretation and naming of their experience. I was initially confronted with the importance of this after the first interview/observation of Diane when we mutually determined that my agenda had not facilitated a true understanding of her experience but rather had imposed an uncomfortable

expertness of mine. This challenged me to step back and listen carefully to her own way of telling her reality. It was a different way of doing research and more than a little risky.

Eventually, I came to truly believe in the incredible power of the group process as I saw it in action in the Drop-In Centre and in our research group dialogues. Together, the women displayed a strong ability to articulate or interpret their personal and collective experiences. Each woman also brought important skills, such as listening or questioning, which facilitated this powerful and empowering research experience. Yet, I also believe that my knowledge of group process, educational and counselling methods, battered womens' experiences and social analyses contributed to our ability to tap their immense wealth of knowledge and challenge the women further. In fact, without my strong philosophy and knowledge, it would have been impossible to do feminist research.

Reflection on the relationship of knowledge to this particular research project provides an opportunity to explore the intersection between research as a vehicle to generate knowledge and education as a means to transmit knowledge. I believe that both of these processes operated continually and interactively throughout this research experience. The primary purpose was to generate knowledge of the women's lived experiences as victims, survivors and advocates. However, we also expanded that knowledge base by sharing our own knowledge and learning from each other. For example, I learned much from Diane about how to verbalize story and theory together. At the same time, it is likely that the others also learned from me. For example, while it was not my intention to impose a particular worldview or social analysis on the others, by situating myself as a member of the research and support groups, I felt free to share my socio-political views as I offered an analysis in the Drop-In Centre or shared my own opinion during the research sessions.

Further, the participants and I envision sharing our "findings," i.e., our stories and the consciousness-raising themes, with others in an effort to transmit the knowledge we have constructed together. Again, however, our intention is to approach such educational opportunities as experts on our own lives, willing to share what we know with the skills that we have, so that others may contextualize and construct knowledge based on their own lived experience. In the Drop-In Centre, for example, we are continuously researching our lives

through the hearing, collecting and writing of individual and collective stories so that we may educate others for the purpose of change.

In summary, it seemed that we were constantly breaking down the traditional dualities during this research process. Therefore, although there is a distinction between research and education, these seem to merge when the generation and transmission of knowledge is seen as a shared and interactive experience.

Conclusion

It is my fervent hope that both the process and findings of this study will contribute in some small way to the emancipation of women from the most overt form of male oppression, battering. My passion is fueled by my own painful history which is clearly situated within a global history of violence against women. It was my wish to understand how myself and others have survived this victimization and have acted passionately on behalf of ourselves and others. I believe that the four participants and I have articulated this process so that other adult educators who have struggled with emancipatory learning phenomena, such as personal/social transformation, may be able to understand and facilitate it further.

This work, however, is not finished. This document is merely a stepping stone for further advocacy.

> We can't, and we won't, leap into a liberated world overnight...We must necessarily effect many small liberations in many small, seemingly insignificant, aspects of our lives or we shall never start 'the revolution' nor even recognize it happening around us. (Stanley & Wise, 1983b, p. 206)

This quote evokes an image of the everyday efforts of everyday people commited to a essentially transformed reality, free of violence and oppression—the desperate dream of young and frightened girl-children and the passionate vision of adult women.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING

October 22, 1993

Dear Participant:

Re: **Research Project:**
The experience of consciousness-raising in abused women

Over the past months, you have participated in a research project leading to a Master's of Education degree from the University of Alberta. The purpose of this research was to understand the process which you experienced in moving from the position of "victim" to becoming an "advocate" for yourself and other women. We have called this a "consciousness-raising" process.

Your participation in this research study has been extremely valuable. I appreciate your time, dedication and assistance throughout the project. I am especially pleased that we carried out the study in a way that involved each of us in a mutual exploration and decision-making experience. Your commitment to yourself, your children and our society is clearly evident.

A sincere thanks to you. Together, we can change the world!

Donna M. Chovanec

I was given a verbal explanation of the research project and the ethical safeguards during the first interview. I verbally consented to participate at that time.

During the study, I was involved in the direction and changes of the research project, especially as they affected my participation. I was reminded that I could choose not to participate further at any time, that I was under no obligation to continue if the research project no longer seemed appropriate or convenient to me.

I understand that confidentiality, but not anonymity, is assured. This means that the researcher respects my privacy and will not reveal my name or the specific details of my story without my permission. I myself have written a version of my story for inclusion in the thesis document.

Name_____
Date_____

ADDENDUM

I give my consent to keeping the tapes and transcripts from the research interviews in a locked filing cabinet in Donna Chovanec's home until we have jointly (i.e., all the participants) determined their usefulness for further advocacy work such as publishing our stories and the research findings.

Name_____
Date_____

APPENDIX B: STORIES

Introduction

Three participants (Shelly, Joan and Diane) wrote both short stories (see Chapter 4) and longer stories which we agreed to incorporate in this section of the thesis document. Cindy wrote only the shorter version which is situated with the others in Chapter 4.

Shelley

I was 18 when M. & I first met, 6 or so months after I had broken off a previous wedding engagement with another fellow. He asked me to go steady with him the first night we went on a date. I made him wait a week before I agreed. We dated for 5 months before he moved to Ontario to work for his uncle. Before he left, we agreed that he would come back and get me after my summer job with the government was over. He was gone for almost 3 months. My 1st move away from home at 19 and it's directly in with a man approximately 1200 miles from any of my family—does the phrase "growing up quick" come to mind!?

I played suzy homemaker for awhile, then I started to resent being expected to do ALL the cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping—woman stuff. I guess I started to resent him for assuming that that was the only way of doing things, as well. "My mother did it for me!" he would repeatedly tell me. If I turned him down in the bedroom it was like I had mortally destroyed his manhood and I was made out as the evil, selfish bitch. Looking back now I can see how that time in Ontario was where I was trained to believe that I couldn't make it on my own, that no one else would want me, that I needed him in order for me to be happy. This isolation laid the ground work for his attempt to cement his power over me so that when we did move back to Edmonton 14 months later I couldn't leave him.

We were engaged December 31, 1985 at 12:05 a.m., 2 months after we moved back. We were house-sitting his parents' place while they were house-sitting a very, very, very rich family friend's place. I spent 5 Christmas' there, I must admit I miss that house! We went along for about a year before making any wedding plans. Six months before the wedding, I decided I needed to move out on my own, to see if I could do it by myself. M. was very threatened by this decision, expecting it to be the end of our relationship. In his mind, I was abandoning him, rejecting him.

I moved into my own apartment October 1986 which was close enough to walk to work since I didn't have my license yet. I loved it, my own place with the furniture where I wanted it, dirty dishes in the sink if I didn't want to do them, independence, and a great view to boot! M. Moved back home when I moved out, claiming that it would save us money for when we were married. I now see this as if I wasn't going to be around all the time to mother him, he would move home and get his mother to mother him—woman's role stuff! He was over as much as he could, trying to keep his control over every sliver of my life. It was during this time that wedding plans were made fast and furious.

We were married April 18, 1987 (Easter weekend) at my parents' home. My uncle performed the ceremony, my mother's cousin took the pictures, my older sister was the maid of honor, my younger brother was the best man, my grandmother made the wedding cake, an old schoolmate did the flowers, we got two white Crown Victorias from where I worked. The reception was held at his parents. The food was prepared by his mother's boss (a friend), it was served by his cousin, the master of ceremonies was his second cousin (a fellow I worked with). All in all, a family affair. We had a 5 day honeymoon in Banff & Jasper using all the money we got from the wedding, about $700. I remember my mother asking me why we didn't just get married while we were in Ontario. That hurt.

So there we were, me at 22 and M. at 24, married. M. was always working seasonal jobs and then sitting on pogie over the winter, that frustrated the hell out of me because I worked full-time all the time from before we met through the time I left to this very day, sometimes working 2 & 3 jobs at the same time! When he was working, it was usually out of town. He finally landed a full-time, all year 'round job with a surveying company, except he was out of town even more now. People used to ask me how I did it with him gone all the time, I told them that you get used to it. I could never get used to it! A physically & emotionally absent husband was not my idea of a perfect marriage. My father-in-law would always bug me about not being pregnant yet, so one day I told him that "I was not prepared to be a single parent!" He didn't like that statement, neither did M.

I remember getting into Amway believing that it would save our marriage if I could just make enough money so he wouldn't have to work out of town and bring us back together, even closer than before. To M. this was just a waste of money and he would run it and me down every chance he got. When M. was

working out of town and he would call me at night, he would tell me about some of the guys he worked with that were married but were still picking up girls and doing the wild thing, but how he would never do that to me because he was a faithful husband even though girls were trying to pick him up! Guilty conscience maybe?! I bought it for as long as I could knowing I was not ready for the alternative.

He was always having accidents on the job, mostly little ones but there were a few big ones where he would end up in the hospital. He was always telling me some story and then saying that he was just kidding or just joking and what was wrong with me that I couldn't tell the difference. It got to the point where I didn't believe any of his stories anymore, even when once he was calling me from a hospital because he had flipped his truck and was actually hurt. And once when a nurse called me at work to tell me he was in the hospital because of another stunt. I didn't believe her either!

As time passed, we grew further and further apart, all the while nothing I did was to his satisfaction. After 4 years, my time was cut in half at work so I found another job, this time in real estate as an assistant. Now M. decided that he had to own his own house before he turned 30 years old. Since he was out of town all the time, it was my JOB to look after all our finances along with EVERYTHING else, which was never to his satisfaction anyway. I scrimped and saved and pulled lists of possibles off the computer at work so that when he did come home for a weekend we could go and drive around to see if we liked any of them. I talked my boss into cutting his commission, I arranged to get into the ones we liked, I arranged our financing with the bank, I arranged our lawyer, I signed the offer to purchase subject to his approval. All he had to do was walk through and say yes or no! We bought our first home December 19, 1990, I was 25 and he was 28 (pre-30!). We took possession February 1, 1991 but couldn't move in until the end of February because there were tenants in the house. I purposefully wanted to buy a house with a suite in the basement for the additional income as well as the company. It took some work to get M. to agree. I can remember M. offering the suite to my younger sister right in front of me without even discussing it with me first! Like my opinion didn't matter anyway, he had made a decision (which was rare actually).

We did alot of work to that house, put a garden in a corner of the backyard, put in a number of flower beds, landscaped with red shale, put up another wall in the basement so the suite would be completely self-contained, painted the

basement suite along with the kitchen and hall upstairs, painted the basement floor, put a new toilet in the basement, re-stained the back deck, re-wired the 220 in the kitchen, etc., etc. I loved my garden and flower beds. I hated mowing the lawn and cleaning up the basement after it flooded one very stormy night while he was out of town, again. As it turned out, I was only in my house for 8 months before I left him.

He had come home for a weekend, shortly before I left, and actually had work in town to do when all of a sudden he was too sick to go in. I thought it was a little suspicious but went to work anyway. Later that night, when I was heading to bed, I noticed the things beside my hope chest were moved so I looked through them. Then I went into the other bedroom where all our files were kept and noticed that everything had been moved. As I searched further, I discovered that ALL the house papers were gone, all my personal chequing statements were gone, all our joint chequing statements were gone, my visa statements, my Sears statements, ALL my papers including some of personal journals, were gone. When I confronted M. as to why these things were missing, he stated to me that "In case you decide to get vicious in the divorce, I will have some ammunition." My sister later told me that that was the only argument she had ever overheard (hard to believe!). When I finally did head back to bed that night, before I went to sleep, I very quietly called my parents and asked that they be a my place at 8 a.m. the next morning to help me move out.

On November 19, 1991 (8 years and 1 day after we first met) I drove M. to work, said "Have a nice day" (the most we had said to each other in probably a week, except for fighting!), drove home, started to pack while waiting for my family to arrive with 2 cube vans, packed myself and my sister up (who had no idea I was leaving let alone that she was leaving until that morning when my mother called to see if we had left yet) in 4 hours. By noon, I was out of a house that I had been told I could not leave until December 1st while he and 3 of his big brawny friends were there to watch so that nothing left that he didn't want to leave. In other words, I defied his authority!

I had found an apartment for the 1st of December so I stayed with my parents until I could get into it, about 10 days. It was a nice apartment with reasonable rent but not in the best area of town so I was somewhat nervous most of the time. I stayed there for 5 months and then moved into a place on the opposite

side of town in an area that I liked and would feel safe in after spending 2 months looking around the city for the right place.

I started going to the Beverly centre after my mother and previously divorced older sister suggested that I talk with a counselor to help me deal with all my emotions, or lack of emotions, as it were. When I first called, the intake worker told me there was a month waiting period before I could get in to see anyone but offered herself if I needed to talk with someone in between time. I took her up on her offer and came in twice. She mentioned that a support group met there every Thursday night and thought I might be interested in checking it out. I turned down the first offer, as I was still too ashamed and embarrassed about my marriage and myself—not even realizing that I had actually been abused in any way!

I finally went to a Thursday meeting in mid-January 1992. There were only about 5 women there but it was nice to hear someone else express my mental state even though they were talking about their own situation. The second week I went, I met Derwyn/Diane who told me about a Three Phase Program that was about to start soon and asked if I would be interested in attending. I told her that I would have to think about it, already thinking to myself that there was no way in hell I was about to get involved in anything that was going to make me look at myself! Denial, denial, denial! Anyway, I kept coming to the Thursday night group and kept hearing about this phase program that was only 2 women short of starting. By listening to the women in the group, I was beginning to put 2 and 2 together and think that maybe I had been abused (a little) so I signed up for the 1st phase. It started sometime near the end of February 1992 and I went to the 8 week program every Tuesday night. I was still attending the Thursday night group so I was getting double the dose of support! I started to understand what abuse was and that I was not responsible or to blame for having had this done to me.

I started to crave information and would listen to anyone who made any kind of sense to me. Some ideas I would accept and others I wouldn't. It was a very exciting time for me even thought I would still go home and cry into my pillow at night. The more I learnt, the more I understood that crying was good and that it was O.K. for me to do it. My old tapes were persistently trying to tell me that if I started to cry, I would lose control and not be able to keep up with M., mentally or verbally and then to be abused for that, as it used to happen in the past. I would not allow myself to cry very often back then especially if he was around. I

was still not speaking very much in either group yet, still stuck in the "I have nothing to offer" and "Nobody would want to listen to me" idealisms and low self-esteem.

When the 2nd phase was offered, I was one of the first in line to jump on the wagon. I was desperately seeking knowledge about this thing called "Battered Wives' Syndrome" and me. This next phase was centered on feelings, my feelings, about abuse, about him, about me. Exceptional! I learnt to voice my ideas and opinions more and more in a safe environment where I wouldn't be judged or have what I had said used against me in any way. Having this respect, freedom & safety opened the door to my future! One week before I moved to my new place (out of the Beverly centre area), I started counseling privately with Derwyn at the Beverly centre. I now had 3 different types of support, the Thursday night drop-in, phase II, & private sessions. I wasn't crying as much, I was getting angry now. They talked alot about channeling your anger and using it positively. I had no idea what that meant!

Channel your anger? where, how?!? I soon began to realize the passion I was feeling towards the battered woman's issue. This was how I was going to channel my anger! By learning anything and everything I could, by doing public speaking and education, by learning how to play the political game. Advocacy!

After the 2nd phase finished, I was becoming more and more vocal in the drop-in. Derwyn asked if I would be interested in co-facilitating the group sometime. I was thrilled with the request but scared of the responsibility. part way through the 3rd phase (the advocacy phase), Derwyn asked me to come with her and 3 other women to speak at a class she was presenting at the University for the Counselling Women Certificate Program. I jumped at the opportunity to help educate women who would be counseling other battered and abused women. I went both days even though I didn't do my presentation until the 2nd day.

I went to the head of the class without any of my notes (on purpose), I wanted to see what would happen—how I would handle it. It started a little awkward but then I seemed to get on a roll and it just began to pour out—unedited! That was not the 1st time I had been at the head of a class to speak. I started singing at 6 until 19 with the church choir, many solos included there. I began playing the piano at 8 years, I was in band all through junior and high school playing the flute, oboe, alto sax, keyboards and percussion along the way in different concert and stage bands. I sang with the Edmonton Centennial

Singers, starting at 14, for 4 years. Through all this there were many recital, concerts, competitions, tours, etc., etc., etc. I loved all the action, and discipline.

I'm just now realizing that I stopped singing and playing my music because of the men I was involved with, it took too much time away from them. I'll have to fix that now! Phase III finished with a feeling of empowerment and a bit of loss for me. A few of the women continued to come to the drop-in. R. was pushing to get a drop-in started on the southside. I was asked if I would be interested in helping to get it going by co-facilitating with 2 social workers. A new challenge and opportunity. Of course, I said yes! That started Wednesday the 24th of February, 1993, all the while I was still attending the Thursday night drop-in, and once a month private sessions. I've made new friends who understand what a battered woman is all about therefore they are able to support me in many different ways than my family.

I must tell you of a triumph I had on January 7, 1993! Back in July 1992, I picked up a double registered letter, in it my husband was suing me for a camera he had given me as a Christmas gift in 1990. At first I panicked. I had never been sued before let alone even gone to the courthouse. I had 6 months to prepare mentally and physically for this confrontation. It would be the 1st time in over a year since I had seen him. After much discussion with Derwyn, running all kinds of scenarios through my mind, actually attending a courtroom session to see how things were run, plus alot of my own soul searching, January arrived. I took my dad with me as a witness, and moral support. I carried my file folder containing any receipts I could find plus copies for the judge, my questions for M., my statement for the court, my questions for dad, and a scratch pad. My dad carried a box of stuff that I had put all of M.'s odds and ends into, including his grandparents 50th wedding anniversary pictures that he had been hounding me about through the lawyers to return.

We arrived 1st, before the courtroom doors were opened. When he finally did arrive, he brought his new girlfriend (or maybe old girlfriend, I don't know) with him. It was a good thing that I had already played this one through my mind once or twice before! He saw us but did not approach so I walked over to them (without even actually thinking about it) and said "Hi." I told him that I had brought a box for him and turned to point at it. His woman yelled my name and handed me some mail so I put out my hand to shake hers and said (very nicely) "Since you know my name, you are..." She proceeded to basically walk right into and past me while huffing the whole time so I laughed out loud at her! M.

didn't even open the box to see what was in it, he just asked if the pictures were there. I tried to speak with him about the divorce but he was NOT receptive in any way. Finally, the courtroom doors were unlocked and we all went in and sat down. After the judge arrived, he asked that if any of the cases before the court could be settled out of court to try and reach a decision that way so as not to waste any of the court's time. A few people got up and left and I wanted to ask M. to leave but before I could get the words out of my mouth, the judge called the 1st case. Again, after the case, the judge asked if anyone else wanted to leave and settle out of court. This time, I asked M. to step outside. M. got up to leave then his woman got up to go with him. I asked her if she would please let us talk in private, she pushed past me again saying that she was with him (as if I wanted him!). Once we were out of the courtroom and after he had made his appropiate condescending remarks to me, I asked him to turn a bit, so she was out of line of vision. And I didn't care how he took it. I told him that I did not wish any ill will on him and that I hoped he was happy along with some other thing, and then finally—Good-bye.

I stepped back into the courtroom feeling as if the world had been finally lifted off my entire body! Our case was the last to be called (thank God—no one else was there to watch!). The judge asked us 3 times if we wanted to call off the case. Neither of us answered so we proceeded. Me with my full file folder and him with his empty threats. He lost the case and I was awarded funds for my and my father's lost wages! His woman was up and out of the courtroom even before M. had turned around to head out himself, which was very fast as well! I thanked the judge, gathered up all my papers and we headed for the door. Once out of the courtroom, I noticed that M. had left the box I brought for him. I considered taking it back with me and then decided to notify the clerk that it had been left behind and then left ourselves.

My father told me that he was very proud of me that day, because of my professional attitude and overall confidence when facing M. and the judge. My father is not one for being very vocal with his feelings. I should also tell you that M. looked like he had lost ALOT of weight, his cheeks were sunk in, his hair was long and stringy, he was very thin. It scared me so bad I had a second HIV test done, the first was 7 months after I left him. I had wanted him to suffer mentally and whatever else I could get for what he had done, but not like this. He looked terrible. I am happy to report that I did NOT have any twinges or heart strings pulled by seeing him. I can move on now, I guess.

On April 3, 1993 I went up to [a small town] with my parents to visit my younger sister. While touring around town, we came upon a car that had cut off another car in the street. I asked dad to pull over and stop because this didn't look right. When we stopped, I got out of the car with my mother's camera, leaned over the roof and aimed it at the man who was now yelling at the woman in the other car. She was trapped by his car and the curb plus he had now ripped open her door and was standing so she couldn't close it. She couldn't back up so she jumped the curb and sped away, with him in hot pursuit. I jumped back in the car and off we were chasing them! He repeatedly tried to cut her off almost hitting her several times, all the while never noticing us in his rear view mirror. My sister was in the front taking pictures, writing down his licence plate number, and the make and approximate year of his vehicle. He finally got around in front of her and stopped her. We pulled right beside her driver's side so he couldn't get to her. I rolled down my window and asked him "Is there a problem here?" My mother later told me I asked him very calmly and politely—to my surprise! He yelled and swore a few things at me. She backed up her car and we moved in right behind him so he couldn't chase her again. I was motioning for her to follow us as he took off around the corner and into an alley. As we sped by, he pulled in behind her and ended up following us both right into the RCMP parking lot!

Before we were even stopped, my sister was out of the car and heading for the front door to get someone. Without any thought, I was out of the car and standing between him and her car, nose to nose, because he was already out of his car and heading for her. He was not a small man and proceeded to try and push me out of his way. I'll never forget that! I kept asking him "Does there seem to be a problem here?" I quickly glanced at her and she looked terrified so then I said "I don't think she wants to talk to you right now." She had managed to get out of the car and ran for the building. This was when I realized that there was a man in the car with her. She got confused and started going around the back of the building. The guy I was blocking managed to get around me and started chasing her so I was right behind him. All the while he's yelling at her and me.

About half way up the back, I think he realized where he was because of all the parked cop cars and he turned around, coming back past me heading for his car, still yelling at anyone including my father who was standing back so he could see both of his daughters, M. in front and me in back. I continued around

back after her passing the jerk she was with who was just walking like this was a common place event! When I got around front, she was with my sister still waiting for someone to come and open the door. I asked her if she was O.K. and who he was. As he drove past, very slowly, he continued to yell at us. I turned my body so I had my back to the door and she would have to turn her back to the road (away form him) in order to speak with me. We gave her his license number and car description and told her that we had taken pictures. As he sped off, someone finally opened the door and she and her wimpy male companion went inside. My dad, sister and I went back to the car, got in and drove away.

We were all talking about this experience while I was coming to the scary realization that I could have been punched, strangled, stabbed, shot—injured or even killed by this very large, highly adrenalized man I was standing up to!! As we continued to drive around, we noticed RCMP out cruising the streets looking for him. I had a tremendous unfinished feeling growing in me so I requested that we return to the RCMP station. We did and I started up to the front door by myself, thinking this is all rather odd! My father then got out of the car and followed me to the door. I rang the buzzer and waited for someone to come open the door, she was sitting by a window looking very timid and small as we walked in. When she saw us, she smiled and sat up straight, I asked her again how she was. We then told the cop that we didn't feel right about just walking away and wanted to make a statement. He took our names, addresses, license numbers, phone numbers, and story. I then wrote my phone numbers on a piece of paper and gave it to her, saying "If you ever want to talk." (I had forgotten I'd done that.) She said thank-you like it was coming from her soul—I felt good! We then found out some of her story and the cops that had been out looking for him returned without him. The officer in charge then told us that he was going to follow about 1km behind her on the highway in case he was waiting for her out there. That made her feel a little better. Just before my dad and I left, I shook her hand and said "be safe." I remember feeling extremely angry towards this abusive behaviour—I guess I was channeling my anger into action!

The month before, in March, I had had my pay cut by $400/month. The work remained the same, just my pay was cut. I considered quitting, but U.I only paid 60% of your wage then, now you don't get anything if you quit! I then decided I was tired of other people pushing my buttons and that I was going to go back to

school. Now I had to decide what I wanted to do! After much thought and discussion, it came down to 2 choices, accounting or social work. After that weekend in [the small town], I decided on social work!

March was a very busy month! I also found out that M. was in default on the mortgage from back to January (actually from after he'd lost the court case). I shopped around for a different lawyer finally finding a woman I felt I could trust and who would go to bat for me if it went that far. The bank notified M. that he had 15 days to pay up all the arrears or the house would go into foreclosure (for the second time—he had done this last year as well, somehow coming up with the money in the nick of time). The only way I knew any of this was because I would call the bank myself, after the first foreclosure threat, every month to check up on the payments. I had my lawyer file divorce papers and a claim under the Matrimonial Property Act, with the courts. I then received a letter form M.'s lawyer stating that the bank was about to foreclose on the house and I had 2 choices—to take over the house and pay up all the arrears or sign my name off the title so that "an interested party" could take over the mortgage. it was stated very clearly that this "interested party" would not touch the property unless I was off the title!

The last paragraph also stated that M. was now ready to start divorce procedures and would my lawyer be willing to serve me papers when the time arose. Well, since I had already filed my divorce papers (but not served him with them yet) we wrote up a Minutes of Settlement for the house and my equity and sent it and the divorce papers over to his lawyer. Twelve days later, I heard back from my lawyer that she had my copy with his signature on the Minutes of Settlement and my money in her trust account but that he had not signed the divorce papers. So close that I could smell my freedom, yet still denied—for now! This is his last claim to any control over me so I'm not going to push him and give away any of my power to him! By pushing, he would know that this was very important to me and therefore not give it to me.

May 29 & 30/93, I took a WEN-DO beginner class with 14 other women, most of which I knew and all of which are exceptional people. WEN-DO is a women's self-defense course taught by women specifically for women with the idea that simply because we are women, we are more vulnerable to attack in today's society—not a very pleasant concept but accurate, I believe. Part of the reason I took this class was so that if I was ever faced with another [small town] incident, I would be able to protect myself and , if need be, whomever else to a certain

degree, if the situation turned physical and got violent. The other reason is, quite frankly, that I am a woman in today's society.

Joan

Most of my life was spent growing up on a farm outside of [a small town]. From a young age, I remember my father hitting my older brother and my mom. My dad stayed home and "baby-sat" while my mother taught school all day. When I got to the age of sixteen, my dad had quite a large herd of cattle, which of course my mother had paid for. My father was basically lazy, and so hired a young man to help on the farm. My brother worked with a seemingly nice young man and one day invited him to come home for supper. Well, you could say it was love at first sight and soon M. was a border at our home. He was 19 and I was 16 and we started to experiment with sex. I was afraid of getting pregnant but he told me not to worry, he'd marry me if that happened, and ever since I was a little girl, all I wanted was to be a mommy. After six months of playing with fire almost every night, I got burned. M. was too shy to go and buy condoms and I was supposed to skip school and go buy them for him. Now, in 1974, I was attending a Catholic high school and they reported anyone who was absent to the parents. I knew that my father would beat me if I skipped school, so I didn't. My father caught me in bed with M. and hit me so hard on the side of the head that he busted my left ear drum. He asked me that night if I really loved M. and I said yes.

I soon had to quit school because I couldn't hear the teachers and I felt very uncomfortable being pregnant in a Catholic high school. We were married in 1974, and two months into the marriage, M. beat me and raped me one night when he was drunk. I didn't realize it was rape until years later because I never believed a husband could rape his wife. That rape made me so depressed that I was sick through the whole pregnancy and weighed 120 lbs. when our son M. was born. When M. hit me in the mouth, he said to me "I should have hit you in the belly." He also had told me that if the baby was a girl, it would stay in the hospital. He never believed that the baby was his because he felt that just because I had given myself to him, I had given myself to others. When M. was two months old, I totally lost it. I disowned him as my son while we were in [another small town] visiting M.'s family. It was Remembrance Day and M.'s mom was making head cheese with real pigs' heads. The men had been

outside killing pigs all day. All this blood and death on T.V. and on the farm was too much for me to handle. My mom and brother came and took my son and I back to G. where I went into hospital for three weeks. I had gone back in my mind to being 4 or 5 years of age and the doctors told M. to stay away from me, that I was too sick for him to see me. My mom and dad had gotten me a private room and guess who snuck into my room? M. When he came in, I asked "Who are you?" He said "I'm M., your husband. Don't your remember me?" He then proceeded to molest me because he did not realize how sick I was and all he ever really wanted was sex. And until then, the rape sex was good for me too, but not after.

Over the years, he got more and more violent with me and our four sons especially after we moved out to a farm. He would get mad and knock me to the ground and then kick me in the back with his steel-toed boots until I could barely get up and he would tell me "Joan, you don't know what a beating is. I gave a man a beating in 1973, in [a large city], and he never got up."

When our youngest son started school, M. told me that I had to go and get a job, or I would have men in the house because there was no one there to tattle on me. I said "Fine, on one condition, that I can save for a house" because we were living in a shack. There were mice, ants and the water pipes would freeze in the winter because there was no basement, only a crawl space. He said "Sure." All I had was my Grade 10 but I managed to get a job as a baker's helper. When my first pay cheque came, I asked M. for grocery money. He said "No, you've got money." And I had to use my pay to buy food. Soon I was buying all the kids' clothes, paying for their school, gas for the car, and even the car because M. had paid for the first car.

While I was at the bakery, I worked with a man and his wife who owned the bakery. Even then, M. accused me of being unfaithful, so I told him to come into the bakery any time and that the back door was always unlocked. One winter morning, he tried to come in the door but it was frozen shut. Boy, did I get it when I got home. The baker and his wife would get mad at each other but he never got violent, or even threw anything.

When I was accepted for a job at the hospital at $9.50 an hour, I took it. The baker understood when I left because he knew what kind of man I was married to. I thought it would be better at the hospital because I would be working with 30 women in the kitchen doing dishes, setting trays and pushing wagons. But when my first pay cheque came, it was $1400.00 as compared to the bakery at

$700.00. Pow! He hit me when I got that pay cheque. He had to knock me down to size, you know. Working with all those women, I learned that not all men beat their wives. Soon, M. quit his job running cat and scraper because he said that he had supported me for 13 years and it was my turn to support him. The trouble was that he had signed for a bunch of farm machinery and I wasn't making enough money to pay for it all.

I remember one night, he came home from the bar and said to me "Do you know what hookers make?" I pretended I hadn't heard him. On the night of my 32nd birthday, he came home drunk at 3 AM and I asked "And where have you been?" because for months if I would come home even 5 minutes late I would be accused of having a quick one with one of the maintenance men at work. He would lock me out of the house and not allow the boys to let me in. And when I would get in, he'd say "We all know what she's been doing." And I started to see through my sons' eyes that they were starting to believe him which really hurt. The boys remember him calling me a slut, whore and bitch. But I remember him calling them "You little bastard!" right in front of me.

That night he pinched my nose so hard while I was lying in bed that he took the skin right off my nose. He grabbed my left breast so hard that I had bruises for three weeks afterward. He punched the wall above my head while I lay there in fear. Because we had no headboard, he made the whole house shake, the kids told me later that day. He ranted and raved until 5 AM and then went to the washroom. He had to get rid of some of that beer, you know. While he was there, I got dressed and went out to the kitchen. I was tired of being raped every day except for when I had my period. While I was eating breakfast, he told me that I wasn't going to work, I was going to screw [somebody else], that I was just a whore and a slut and a bitch. I just ignored him, as best as I could. I had to be at work at 6:30 AM and it took me a half hour to drive into town, from the farm. I managed to get him to let me out of the house to feed the dog.

And, while I was out, I went and started the car. It was the 23rd of February and 20 below Fahrenheit. I locked the car doors for some reason and sat in the car waiting for it to warm up. Very soon, he was at my window, with no coat or boots, just his socks and work clothes. I opened my car window, just 2-3 inches it seemed, and he stuck his arm right in and grabbed the keys out of the ignition. I knew he had me. So, I opened the car door and asked "What do you want, I have to get to work?" Well, he started to slap my face again, and said "You're not going to work, you're just going to screw." I finally got mad and slapped his

face with the back of my left hand and the wedding band on my finger cut his lip. He put his hand to his mouth and then looked at the blood on his fingers. Then he went mad. He lunged at me, because my car door was open, and twisted my body onto the front seat, face up. He then started punching me in the face and jaw, breaking my nose and almost breaking my jaw. He then grabbed onto my throat and started to choke me until I couldn't scream or even breathe. When I lost consciousness, he let go and got off. I said "Take me. Just take me."

Many times he wanted to take me to the hospital and leave me there because he told me I had a boyfriend and that I could go to him and live because he was supposed to be better than M. I never dreamed of having another man because when we first got married, he warned me that if he ever caught me with another man, he would kill me. And I believed him.

He got off of me and I sat up in the passenger seat beside him. He told me to wipe my face and so I checked my coat pocket for a tissue, but couldn't find one. So I told him "Just let me go to the house and wash my face." He wouldn't let me out of the car until I gave him my other set of car keys. I went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror and said to myself "Well, he sure did it this time. I'm going to have a hard time hiding this." I went back out into the living room and told him that if he was going to drive me to the hospital, that he should have some shoes on. For some strange reason, he changed his mind and didn't want to take me. He gave me one set of keys and, as I walked out the door, he said "No police better show up here." I just started for the car and, as I got to the car door, he said "Here!" and threw the other set of keys at my face. Luckily, he missed.

I got in the car and drove at 120 KMH, in the dark, in winter, on highways famous for all the wildlife on them, all the way to town. I later found out that M. remembers coming to, in the hospital parking lot at 6:30 AM. He had followed my tail lights all the way to town and, because I had not seen any lights, I knew that he had been right on my ass all the way to town. I don't know if he wanted me to hit a moose or something and get killed because I had a $100,000 life insurance policy on my head. So, I was worth more to him dead than alive.

I managed to drive to the hospital and do my breakfast toast and the dishes afterward. At coffee break, the women all told me to go up to emergency and so I did. The nurse took over when I told her I was afraid to go home. She told me I should see a doctor and asked if she could contact the Crisis Worker. I said yes. Soon the boys and I were on the bus to a shelter in Edmonton We stayed

at WIN 2 [a shelter] for three weeks and then moved to Wings [a second stage centre]. My mom soon came back from France, where she was working, to help me and the boys. If it were not for her, I would have gone back to M. in the first six months after I left. But she protected me until I was strong enough to be on my own.

Soon, I was back in school, downtown, doing my upgrading. And now I am in a school of nursing. I still have the three younger boys. The city was too hard for the oldest to get used to but he is doing fine in P. and has been dating the same girl for two years and is coming 19 soon. I feel my life can only get better because it can't get much worse.

Diane

My name is Diane, I am 44 years old and have been out of a 17 year abusive relationship for 8 years. I have three children: a daughter who is now 22 years old, two sons, one aged 19 and one aged 17.

I met my ex-husband while I was still in high school. He was not. I was the shy, quiet high school senior who had not yet had any serious boyfriends. He was the "older, worldly man." This seemed very exciting.

As my relationship grew more serious, J. very subtly began a campaign of control. For example, he persuaded me to wear what he liked, go where he wanted to go and then see only his friends, my friends were no longer good enough. I did not think this was wrong, I thought he really cared and only wanted the best for me and for me to be the best I could be.

New Year's Eve, 1967, J. and I went to a community party. As midnight neared, the MC called for everyone's attention. As we sat, with my parents and his family, the MC announced congratulations to Diane and J. on their engagement. I was stunned, but too shy and shocked to say anything. We had not even discussed marriage. As the wedding day grew closer, things seemed to be going well between us. I had not wanted to think about the subtle control issues that were present.

Our wedding day came, I was so happy. It was a beautiful June day. The ceremony was perfect, the day more than I had hoped for. The next day, reality set in. I wanted to go to my parent's home for the gift opening, J. did not. As I attempted to leave the room, he punched me in the face. I was stunned. He explained it away, saying that he was stressed from the wedding plans, tired

from the party and he was truly sorry. I believed him, I wanted so much to believe that I was the only person in the world that could make him happy. I went to the open house, bruised, shaken and embarrassed. I explained the black eye away be saying that I had walked into the door frame, after having too much to drink last night. Everyone seemed to buy the story. If they didn't, no one confronted me.

The next few years were relatively calm. All my attention and time was devoted to his wishes and wants. I thought everything was going well—sure, we had our arguments—he would yell, curse and call me names but I never believed he would harm me, let alone attempt to kill me.

Soon I was pregnant, and very happy about that. The tension in my relationship was building. As I and my baby developed, I became more and more anxious for the pregnancy to be completed. Sides of J. were beginning to show themselves, sides I had not seen before, or at the very least, not wanted to recognize. His control of me, my time, my thoughts, ideas and actions were paramount. After my daughter was born, the house seemed again to settle down. He was very proud to be a daddy, that is, until my daughter started to confuse nights and days and was very colicky. I was exhausted all the time; taking care of my daughter at night when she would not sleep, and taking care of J. the rest of the time. There was no time for me. I was hit for the first time since the wedding. This was for not having dinner ready "on time." Dinner was 5 minutes late.

I was stunned. J. apologized and swore it would never happen again. I believed him. He was partially right, hitting would not happen again (until the other children were born), but threats, intimidation and manipulation increased. After my youngest was 4 years old, I wanted to go to work part time. J. would not hear of it. He finally conceded and I secured a part time job at W., as a sales clerk. This was just what I needed and wanted. Part time work, in the evenings, when J. could mind the kids. On evening, J. dropped into the store to see me. I saw him enter and then leave abruptly. When I got home, he told me that I had better quit my job as men were working in the store. I refused to quit.

Approximately 1 month later, when I went to work and attempted to use the punch clock, my supervisor approached me and asked what I thought I was doing. He indicated to me that my husband had come into the store and told them that I had quit and would not be returning to work. I lost my job, my only contact with the outside world. I stayed home again with the kids. About 4

months later, J. quit his job, just out of the blue. I was stunned. This meant that I would have to get another job to support the family. How could I do this? Surely not with a part time job. I decided that if he would not be responsible and help support the family, I would get a full time job, and not for $5.00 an hour. I had worked for the Provincial Government before my marriage and before the kids were born. I re-applied and was accepted. This job would at least put food on the table and pay the mortgage.

My marriage went down hill from here on. As J. lost control of his life to alcohol, he gripped tighter onto the control he had over me and the kids. Life became unbearable some days and near to bearable others, dependant on his moods. In order to maintain the control, that I was fighting against in my own way, he became more and more physically threatening and violent. The emotional/psychological abuse permeated every aspect of the relationship. After each child was born, the abuse increased. This, I discovered much later, was also part of the control issues he was dealing with. As I spent more and more time with growing children and a job outside of home, he felt more threatened and his way of regaining control and total dominance was abuse.

As the kids began growing up, testing limits, speaking their minds, having opinions that differed from his, he also began to control them. Although he did not outwardly physically abuse the kids, to my knowledge at the time, the threats of violence, mind games and name-calling and put-downs were horrendous. My youngest son began to display signs of depression. I took him to several psychologists recommended by the school board, who told me that the kid just needed **more** discipline. I did not believe that would solve the problem. It was about this time that I noticed problems with my other children. My daughter was truant from school more than she was there. My eldest son became aggressive with his friends and joined sports, any sports (football, rugby, hockey, soccer) as a way of getting rid of the pent up aggression. My youngest son refused to attend school, refused to leave the house, refused to be with his friends, refused to be part of the family. This came to near tragedy one afternoon when I was driving to the mall. My daughter and youngest son, K., were in the back seat, my elder son was in the front when K. attempted to jump out of the moving car. My daughter grabbed his arm and pulled him half way back into the car.

As soon as I stopped the car, I knew that K. needed more help than I could give him. And the help was definitely NOT more discipline. He needed a stable, structured, safe home environment. As I composed myself, K. went into

what I have since learned was a hysterical converse reaction. This allowed me the time to drive him to the hospital without further incident. I asked the doctors to help me, to help K. Finally, the doctors understood my anxiety about K.'s behaviour and agreed to admit him to a residential program for assessment. After the assessment, K. remained a resident of the hospital program for 3 more years, coming home only on weekends. We were fortunate in that now we, as a family, could get all the support and counselling we required. My ex-husband would not go to the counselling, he did not think he had a problem. The kids and I took all the counselling we could. With each session, the kids and I grew stronger, grew more aware that we did not have to live like this.

One of the subtle and most damaging forms of abuse is the emotional and psychological. I found this the hardest to overcome. Every time I was called names like slut, whore, fatty, stupid, lazy, my self-esteem was surely being eroded, bit by bit, until I came to believe that I could not survive without his support, love understanding and direction. Yes, I said love, that was very hard for me to grasp. How could someone who professed to love me so much possibly ever think of harming, never mind possibly killing me? The threats of harm to the children were the last straw. It was not long after that that I told him I wanted to leave with the kids. He told me that "If he couldn't have me, then no one would," that he would kill me. My children each went into counselling, as did I. From our home, this attitude and conditioning would be carried into their home, as adults, and so perpetuate the cycle of violence. The only way out is through counselling, group therapy and support groups.

As I saw signs that my children were being affected, I started to make moves towards escaping this hell we called home, with them. This planning stage took me years to complete. And even when I was totally under his control, I was still planning, knowing that there had to be a better life out there somewhere. I left the relationship numerous time, sometimes for hours, days or even months. But each time, either I returned or I invited him back into the home. I wanted so much to believe that he would change, that he loved me, that I could have the fairy tale marriage that I had always dreamed about. It was really difficult to accept that that "fairy tale" was not going to be mine.

It took 5 nights of sheer terror to force my move out of the house for the last time. He repeatedly threatened me with a gun, beat me for reasons I don't know nor understand and "played" sex games. I would be kept awake all night under threats of dying. Then I would go to work during the day in order to put food on

the table. The kids were kept home from school, to ensure that I would return in the evening. It worked. During this ordeal, all I wanted to do was get the gun and kill him before he killed me. I truly believed that I was going to die. That opportunity arose, he went into an alcohol seizure and I took the gun from his had, but I did not kill him. All I could think about was how to get the kids and myself safely out of the house for good.

From that morning on, we have not been back to that relationship. My daughter, elder son and I went to WIN House. My youngest was still in the hospital residential program. We stayed at WIN House for 3 weeks. During this time, my ex-husband vacated the property so the kids and I moved back in. J. admitted himself into a hospital psych ward. The doctor there referred him to a men's program for abusers. The counsellor at the program called me and indicated that he was concerned for my safety. He put me in touch with a social worker from Community and Family Services who was commencing a 24 week, structured, support group for abused women. It was while I was in this group that I began to understand that I was not to blame for being abused.

As I grew stronger and stronger and began to really understand the dynamics of family violence, I grew more and more determined to save my children from a lifetime of pain and suffering. This may sound overly simplistic, but I try not to dwell on the past, but look forward to the future. After leaving the relationship, as I mentioned earlier it has been 8 years, the violence has not gone away. It is true that it has subsided but it is also ever-present. My ex-husband is not about to admit that he is violent, nor is he about to seek out help for the control issues and dominance that he seems to require in order to feel good about himself. He must come to the realization that he is the only person who can change his behaviour and, until he chooses to understand and believe that women and men are equal in value, intelligence and integrity, he will never move on to a fulfilling future. But that is his story.

My daughter is now in the 4th year of university, studying criminal psychology. My eldest son has completed high school and is awaiting enrollment in SAIT. My youngest son is still in high school and doing O.K. My hopes for the future lie with the children. When the violence stops in our homes, then the children will learn by living that love does not hurt, that love is light, warm and free. This attitude and idea will also be passed on to their children because children learn not only what they are formally taught, but also what

they see (interactions between parents), feel (free to express every thought and idea) and hear (words that are loving, kind, praising as well as disciplining).

I have moved on from victim survivor and am now and advocate of women/children. I co-founded a Drop-In Centre for Abused Women and have had the opportunity to do Public Education for the Justice System and Policing Agencies.

My kids and I are still concerned about our safety. My ex-husband still harasses, threatens and, on occasion, comes to my house uninvited. I am still fearful for my life but I feel fortunate to be one of only 12 women in the Edmonton area to have the ADT LifeLine installed in my home. J. lives within a block of my house and, with his history and continued stalking and harassing, the kids and I feel more secure knowing that, at the push of a button, police will arrive within about 3 minutes.

I believe that J. could possibly kill me one day. However, I have taken all the precautions I can now and am going to live my life to the fullest every day. I am no longer going to hide out and wait for IT to happen. I have taken control of my own life. What he does is out of my control.